Short Communication

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE FEEDING OF *SCURRULA PARASITICA* LINN. (LORANTHACEAE) SEEDS BY BIRDS

Members of Loranthaceae, popularly known as misletoes, are semiparasitic angiosperms. They mostly attack dicotyledons and gymnosperms and cause more economic loss than any other angiospermic parasite. Birds play an important role in the dispersal of mistletoes. Sunbirds and the flowerpeckers are the main dispersal agents of the broad leaved mistletoes (Ali 1931, Weeraratna 1959, Gill and Hawkworth 1961, Singh 1962, Ghosh *et al.* 1984). Davidar (1980) reported that frugivorous birds such as bulbuls and barbets also helped in dispersal of mistletoes. The ripe one-seeded berry of mistletoes contains a sweet viscid pulp surrounding the seed. During feeding, the birds squeeze the viscid seed out of the epicarp by their beak, throw the epicarp and swallow and excrete the seed on to a branch (Ali 1931). Davidar (1980) also reported that a flowerpecker *Dicaeum concolor* (Dicaeidae) used a different technique to disperse the seed. The flesh alone is eaten, epicarp is dropped and the seed is rubbed off from its bill on to a branch.

In Bangladesh the Loranthaceae is represented by 15 species under seven genera (Alam 1985). There is no record of any systematic study on the dispersal mechanism or feeding of loranthaceous fruits by birds. Recently, a bush of *Scurrula parasitica* Linn. developed in the mid-crown region of a *Lagerstroemia indica* Linn. tree at the Bangladesh Forest Research Institute Campus, Chittagong. The parasitic bush was kept under observation to see the dispersal mechanism. *Scurrula parasitica* started flowering in October and continued till February. Fruiting started from November and continued synchronously with flowering. At the time of flowering and fruiting of the parasite, the host plant became partially leafless. During fruiting, from December to February, the following birds were found to feed on the seeds of *S. parasitica* :

Dicaeidae : *Dicaeum erythrorhynchos* (pale-billed flower pecker)

D. cruentatum (scarlet-backed flower pecker)

D. concolor (plain flower pecker)

Ploceidae : (?) *Lonchura punctulata* (scaly breasted munia)

The birds were observed with a pair of binoculars.

It was observed that the birds consumed approximately 5–10 seeds one after another within a few minutes and simultaneously excreted the seeds without any physical change. The rubbed or excreted seeds are copiously covered with a viscous matter and stick to the branch where they germinate, and may develop into new parasitic bush. During and after feeding, the birds moved from one branch to another or moved around the host plant.

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