

COPPERSMITH BARBET

A short note on the courtship behaviour of *Psilopogon haemacephalus*, Müller, 1776



IUCN Red List:
Least Concern
(BirdLife
International 2016)

Coppersmith Barbet

Coppersmith Barbet *Psilopogon haemacephalus* (Müller, 1776) is a bird of the family Megalaimidae. It is a small dumpy grass-green barbet with yellow throat, crimson breast and forehead and green streaked yellowish under parts. Short truncated tail is distinctly triangular in flight silhouette. It chiefly eats fruits, berries and sometimes winged termites. The breeding season of the bird is November to June and it makes a hole-nest (Ali & Ripley 2007). The red and yellow bands on the chest are brighter in the male as compared to the female counterpart. The bird is a breeding resident of Rajasthan State (Sivaperuman et al. 2004; Sangha & Devershi 2006; Ghazala et al. 2006; Mohammed et al. 2011; Koli 2014; Joshi & Bhatnagar 2015) and can be seen in open wooded country, groves and urban gardens (Ali & Ripley 2007; Grimmet et al. 2013).

Aves
[Class of Birds]

Piciformes
[Order of the woodpeckers and relatives]

Megalaimidae
[Family of Asian Barbets]

Psilopogon haemacephalus
[Coppersmith Barbet]

Species described by Müller in 1776



On 15 June 2014 during our morning field visit to the wetland of Arwad Village (25.8288°N & 74.8188°E) of Bhilwara District in Rajasthan, we saw a pair of Coppersmith Barbet on Babul tree *Vachellia nilotica*, engaged in

Global Distribution:

Native: Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Viet Nam (BirdLife International 2016)

courtship. The tree was located on the bank of a small water body on the other side of which was a concrete road connecting two human dwellings of the same village. People and small vehicles moved frequently on this road. There was an open agricultural land beyond the road. We saw the events of courtship behaviour of the Coppersmith Barbet pair and photographed the activity using Canon 1200 DSLR

While observing, the pair was found to be perching on twigs. The male then started fluttering its wings and spread the tail feathers as a fan. It then bent its limb so the abdomen became flat and was in direct contact with the branch. Initially, the female did not take any notice but later it began to see the male. After two minutes the male approached the female and sat near it having alike orientation and started fluttering its wings.



Then the male changed its orientation to 180° and continued to flutter its wings. The female sitting almost two feet away, did not pay any attention to the male. The male now came closer to the female. When the male was very close, the female opened its bill probably in anticipation of food, although, we could not see any food material in male's bill. Thereafter the female inserted its bill into the male's bill. In this locked position they shook their heads and bent up to 90°. After sometime the male fluttered its wings once again and flew away



to another branch.

After one minute, the male again approached the female and sat at a twig behind the female. As soon as the female saw the male, it oriented itself towards the male. The female was looking more attentive this time. The male started hanging fluttering its wings and simultaneously changed its orientation. Then it hanged upside down on the twig. After this behaviour, the male approached

the female and they once again locked their bill, *albeit* only for a few minutes before separation. After the separation, the male went back to its original position and the female approached him eagerly. It repeated the same action upside down like the male and moved closer to the male. During the course of this behavior, the male kept its wings fluttering. Then the male flew away once again.



The male then returned after approximately 50 seconds and perched itself on a twig above the female and started fluttering its wings. When fluttering the wings it repeatedly moved its body from left to right. Simultaneously it moved its head up and down. This activity might have been used to show the bright red colour of neck and head to the female. After few seconds of this action female went close to male and opened its bill. The same action of bill locking was repeated this time. Then the male fluttered its wings vigorously for a few seconds and flew away. Thus the cycles of getting closer,



fluttering of wings, grasping each other's beak and flying away of male were repeated again and again.

During this 12 minutes observation, there was regular movement of people and vehicles. After this a large truck passed by and the noise from the truck disturbed the pair and both the birds flew away. We followed the birds for some distance but they disappeared into the agricultural

fields and we could not record the mating.

References

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