

USE OF BAYA *PLOCEUS PHILIPPINUS* NESTS IN POTTERY AND CROP PROTECTION IN RAJASTHAN

Satish Kumar Sharma¹ and Rakesh Vyas²

¹ Range Forest Officer, Phulwari Wildlife Sanctuary, Kota, District Udaipur, Rajasthan 307025, India.

² 2-Pa-22, Vigyan Nagar, Kota, District Udaipur, Rajasthan, India.

A number of biotic and abiotic factors are responsible for the destruction of the nests of weaver birds *Ploceus philippinus*, *P. benghalensis* and *P. manyar* in Rajasthan (Sharma, 1997). Among biotic factors man plays a major role in the destruction of nests. Many activities like lopping trees, harvesting grass, reeds and cattails for thatching, rope making and fire are responsible for the destruction of weaver nests. Sometimes, weaver nests are collected and used as fibre in filling pillows and as a strainer for sieving sugarcane juice and buttermilk. They are also used as scrubber, fancy caps, baskets, fuel, fodder and novelties (Sharma, 1991a, b).

Recently we saw two interesting uses of deserted nests of *P. philippinus* in rural areas of Kota and Udaipur districts. Weaver nests are used in pottery in Hadoti region of eastern Rajasthan, especially in Kota District. A primary shape is given to an earthen pitcher and removed from the potter's wheel to give it a final shape by beating it gently with a wooden hammer. Hammering is done on the outer surface only while a weaver nest is kept in contact with the inner surface of the pitcher to act as a cushion to avoid breaking of the pot.

One to few families of potters live in each big village of Kota District. Manufacturing of earthen pots is their traditional occupation. Nests of weaver birds are easily available in village agricultural fields and are collected after the month of October, specially during winters. By this time, weaver birds desert their nests after breeding. Nests are collected and stored, keeping the requirement for a whole year in mind.

Another interesting use of Baya nests was observed in Jhadol Tehsil of Udaipur District, in southern Rajasthan during Rabi crop season. There, Baya nests are used for making bird-perches. A bird-perch is a simple device made by keeping a deserted nest at one end of a bamboo stick. Such large number of bird-perches are erected in wheat fields, keeping the 'nest

cap' upward. It is believed by the local Bhil farmers that insect eating birds and rat devouring owls are attracted toward these perches. They sit on them and help in destroying crop pests. Nests, used for making bird-perches are collected during November-December.

Though abandoned nests are of no use to Bayas, many small mammals, birds and insects use them for various purposes. Redents, like *Vendeluria oleracea* (Ali & Ambedkar, 1956), *Mus* sp. (Ragupathy & Davis, 1984), *M. booduga* (Akhatar & Tiwari, 1992) and Painted Bat *Kerivoula picta* (Sharma, 1986) use Baya nests for shelter and/or littering. Birds, like White-throated Munia *Lonchura malabarica* (Ali, 1931; Ambedkar, 1970), Spotted Munia *L. punctulata* (Sharma, 1987) and House Swift *Micropus affinis* (Kirkpatric, 1950) also use abandoned nests for shelter and/or breeding. Being poikilothermic animals, many arthropods pass winters in abandoned nests. Some of them multiply there (Sharma, 1991b). Destruction of abandoned nests of Baya deprive many small animals of shelter and breeding (Sharma, 1997), thus commercial nest-using practices of humans may affect local population and demography of various nest-user species of mammals, birds and arthropods.

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