

The appearance and behaviour of the nestlings were also interesting. When approached, the larger and nearer nestling partially rose out of the nest and erected its head feathers in an apparent threat display. Aware of its poisonous reputation, one of us tested its toxicity by touching the nestling's head and placing his finger in his mouth. Contrary to the effects described by Dumbacher et al. (1992), no irritation or numbing of buccal tissue occurred. Either nestlings show less toxicity than adults or Hooded Pitohuis on the Bomberai Peninsula are less toxic than those tested from eastern New Guinea. Dumbacher (1994) reports geographical variation in toxicity of the Hooded Pitohui and suggests that the Variable Pitohui *P. kirhocephalus*, which shows remarkable geographic plumage variation (Beehler 1986, Coates 1990), most closely mimics the Hooded Pitohui where the latter is most toxic. We noted that the Variable Pitohui in the Bomberai Peninsula did not closely resemble the Hooded Pitohui, having a grey head, wings and tail, and a lighter orange body. We find it intriguing that the nestlings were developing immediately into adult plumage, bypassing the juvenile plumage stage exhibited by many birds (Butcher & Rohwer 1989). Assuming the striking colouration of adults acts as a warning to potential predators, then even if nestlings lack toxicity, their adult automimicry should afford them some protection (e.g. Sordhal 1988).

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A Nesting Colony of Yellow-eyed Starlings *Aplonis mystacea*

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The distribution of the Yellow-eyed Starling *Aplonis mystacea* was recently reviewed by Beehler & Bino (1995). The species is poorly known from a few sites in the southern lowlands of New Guinea. To the few previous records from the lowlands of the Fly and Turama River drainages and southern Irian Jaya, Beehler & Bino (1995) extended the known distribution ESE by 330 km, with two sightings (one tentative, one certain)

in the Lakekamu Basin (Central and Gulf Provinces, Papua New Guinea) in 1979 and 1993. The nesting habits are unknown (Coates 1990). It is therefore worth recording that during 17 weeks of fieldwork during 1994-95 in the Lakekamu Basin, I saw Yellow-eyed Starlings frequently and found an active nesting colony. These records are summarised here.

Observations were made at two study sites in the

same tract of lowland alluvial forest as the previous records. Both sites were in Gulf Province, next to the Avi-Avi River, East Branch (so-named on Sheet 8182 of the 1:100 000 map series). Korr Camp ($7^{\circ}47'S$, $146^{\circ}28'E$; c. 40 m asl; used between October 1994 and January 1995) was around 6 km downstream (SSW) from Sapwe Camp ($7^{\circ}44'S$, $146^{\circ}29'E$; c. 120 m asl; used in February and March 1995); these are respectively the Biaru and Kamea names for the same river. Korr Camp was 18 km NW of Nagore ($7^{\circ}54'S$, $146^{\circ}33'E$), the site of the confirmed record by Beehler & Bino (1995); their tentative record was between Nagore and Korr (at $7^{\circ}49'S$, $146^{\circ}32'E$; Beehler et al. 1995).

At Korr Camp, several flocks of *Aplonis* starlings were seen. These were expected to consist only of Metallic Starlings *Aplonis metallica* but almost whenever the flocks could be checked, Yellow-eyed Starlings were found as well, producing ten certain sight records. I was at the time unaware of the previous records in the area, so identification was made with caution. The overall structure (including the tail) was not seen to differ from *metallica*. The eyes of adults generally appeared white (only the closest views revealed a pale yellow colour) and these were obvious compared to the bright red eyes of *metallica*. The head and body appeared duller and smoother than on *metallica*, apparently owing to a brown tinge on the head and neck and a reduction or lack of purple iridescence. The narial crest was inconspicuous and seen on only a few individuals. Immature *mystacea* were also identified. All adults at the breeding colony (see below) were *mystacea* and so it seems likely that most or all immatures there were also *mystacea*; similar birds were seen at Korr. These showed a plumage pattern like that of immature *metallica* (see Beehler et al. 1986; Coates 1990) but their eyes were just as startlingly whitish as were those of the adults. They certainly could not be called olive-grey or olive-yellow, which is the palest in the range of eye colours given by Coates (1990) for young *metallica*. Immatures were therefore identified by eye colour alone.

All Yellow-eyed Starlings seen at Korr Camp (ten records) were in feeding flocks with Metallic Starlings. Flocks consisted of up to 60 birds, but usually most flock members were unidentified. Metallic was usually the commoner species; however, of ten identified to species in one flock of about 20 starlings, six were Yellow-eyed, four Metallic. No behavioural differences between the two species were noticed.

On 20 February 1995, while walking along an old

trail between the villages of Akabenga and Tekadu, about 2 km south of Sapwe Camp, I found an active colony of Yellow-eyed Starlings. No Metallic Starlings were seen at the colony, which was active throughout my time at the site, and presumably had been active long before, because the ground below was thickly carpeted with guano. The colony was in a single large tree clearly visible from the trail, in structurally unaltered forest about 1 km from the foot of the hills enclosing the Lakekamu Basin and at least 2 km from the nearest sizeable river (the main Avi-Avi). The tree was about 30 m tall, live, smooth-barked, devoid of creepers and standing apart from neighbouring trees. The colony contained about 150 nests, many active. These were globes, untidily constructed from strips of vegetation; some were suspended, some supported. Most were in clusters of up to about 15 nests and some nests were in contact as if built on to one another. Around 200 birds were present, many bringing food (small red berries were seen) to young, which were being fed at the nest entrances. About 10% of the birds present were immatures. The continuous highpitched chattering calls made the colony sound at a distance like a lorikeet feeding tree; these calls are difficult to compare with calls heard from individual foraging Metallic Starlings at Korr, although both were tape-recorded.

Villagers reported that such colonies were sometimes destroyed by cutting the entire tree down; eggs, chicks and adults would all be eaten. In late April 1995 (a few weeks after our departure from the area), this is precisely what happened to the colony described here (C. Makamet pers. comm.) It seems surprising that it had survived so long because it was well known to the villagers. No other Yellow-eyed Starling colonies have been found since.

The colony was just outside the main study area of Sapwe Camp and no *Aplonis* starlings of either species were recorded in the six weeks spent surveying this study area. This suggests that favoured feeding trees were outside this area and that foraging birds did not merely spread out in all directions from the colony. Similarly at Korr Camp, flocks remained faithful to certain trees and were never seen in other parts of the study area.

These observations confirm the regular presence and breeding of Yellow-eyed Starlings in the Lakekamu Basin; both are already proven for Metallic Starling (Beehler & Bino 1995). Although the two species form mixed flocks, observations made so far suggest that they do not occur in mixed colonies here. The eye

colour is so startling that a clear view of the head should allow identification even at a distance, but I suggest that Yellow-eyed Starlings may be overlooked because they often occur in flocks with larger numbers of Metallic Starlings that are difficult to check through.

The Yellow-eyed Starling colony in the Lakekamu Basin appeared no different from Metallic Starling colonies described by Coates (1990). Indeed, these new observations reveal not a single ecological difference between the two species. The development of research facilities in the Lakekamu Basin offers the opportunity to study them in sympatry; if no segregating mechanisms are found, the possibility could be considered that the widespread and adaptable Metallic Starling is gradually replacing the Yellow-eyed.

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Opinion 1833. *Psittacus banksii* Latham, 1790 and *P. lathamii* Temminck, 1807 (currently *Calyptorhynchus banksii* and *C. lathamii*; Aves, Psittaciformes): specific names conserved.