

Waterhen feeding on cooked rice. As in this case, this individual White-breasted Waterhen may be an opportunistic feeder of cooked rice. It may be that due to scarcity of its natural food items in its territory, this solitary White-breasted Waterhen was forced to feed on cooked rice. It should be noted that, the adjacent soggy plot is a favorite breeding ground of the White-breasted Waterhens.

The observation on White-breasted Waterhen feeding on cooked rice indicated the changing feeding pattern of common bird species living in and around human habitations. My observation of White-breasted Waterhen feeding on cooked rice is noteworthy, but it does not mean that all the individuals of this species prefer to feed on cooked rice. This incident significantly establishes the fact that human interferences and actions not only alter the natural environment but also affects or changes the life style and behaviour of some bird species. In the instant case it was the vermi-composting garbage pit that had influenced the feeding behaviour of a White-breasted Waterhen.

BIRDS TAKING LEAF BATH by RAJU KASAMBE, Bombay
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On 9th June 2009 morning at around 0900 am it started raining in Thane where I stay. That was the first rain-shower after the hot spell of summer here. After some time it stopped raining and there was sunlight. I was looking out from my 7th floor apartment at the tree tops where I generally see very common birds. At 0940 am I saw four Rose-ringed Parakeets (*Psittacula krameri*) on a Jamun (*Syzygium cumini*) tree top. Their behavior was peculiar. They were jumping over thin branches and moving through the dense foliage of leaves. The first thought was that they were searching fruits. I brought my binoculars and started observing, but, surprisingly the tree bore no fruits. The Parakeets were holding thin branches in the bill and then using this hold pressed themselves through the thick foliage which had lot of rain droplets gathered over them and climbed to another thin branch. The Parakeets were thus using the raindrops to wet their plumage.

After behaving like this for some time, they perched on top branches of the tree in sunlight and started fluffing and preening the feathers. After few minutes of preening and fluffing, all the Parakeets flew away.

At 02.30 pm again there was a heavy downpour in Thane for some time. I saw two House Crows (*Corvus splendens*), on the same Jamun tree top. Both the crows were seen moving through the thick foliage and getting wet with the droplets of water. After 5-7 minutes of getting wet, both the crows flew, one to a tree top branch and another to a loft of our building. Both started fluffing and preening their wings, while it was still raining.

On 15th July 2010, at 0800 hrs a House Crow was again seen taking leaf bath using the rain drops on the same Jamun tree and also on the foliage of a nearby Gold Mohur (*Delonix regia*) tree.

I remembered my old days in Amravati, Maharashtra (2000-2004). I used to sprinkle the plants in my house yard daily with

a pipe. Two Ashy Prinias or Ashy Wren-Warblers (*Prinia socialis*), one or two Common Tailor Birds (*Orthotomus sutorius*), one or two Purple Sunbirds (*Nectarinia asiatica*) and one Purple-rumped Sunbird (*Leptocoma zeylonica*) used to wait till I sprinkle water on an Ixora (*Ixora coccinea*) plant, which had somewhat large leaves. As soon as I moved to watering the next plants they used to jump and rub the belly and slide on the leaves. Then they hopped from one leaf to other and wetted their bellies and then the wings and then fly away to the electric wire. There, they used to perch in the sunlight and fluff and preen their feathers.

On the website of Bird Ecology Study Group (BESG)(Internet Reference-1 and 2), I found that there were references of passerines taking leaf bath. These include: Rufous-tailed Tailorbird (*Orthotomus sericeus*), Scaly-breasted Munia (*Lonchura punctulata*), Striped Tit Babbler (*Macronous gularis*), Olive-winged Bulbul (*Pycnonotus plumosus*), Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum cruentatum*) and Copper-throated Sunbird (*Nectarinia calcostetha* or *Leptocoma calcostetha*).

The website also mentioned that, besides bathing in puddles formed after rains, the birds also took advantage of the water droplets that gets collected on leaves after a heavy spray of water by a gardener or after a drizzle. Description of dew-bath by North American birds, viz., Clay-colored Sparrows (*Spizella pallida*) and Yellow-rumped Warblers (*Dendroica coronata*) is described on this web-link (Internet Reference no.3).

I searched for references on Indian birds taking leaf bath, but found none (Burg et. al. 1994).

Natarajan and Balasubramanian (1992) have reported dew bath by Purple-rumped Sunbird *Nectarinia zeylonica* on leaves. But bigger birds like the Rose-ringed Parakeet or the House Crow have not been reported taking leaf bath.

References:

- Burg, C.G., Beehler, B.M. and Ripley, R. (1994): Ornithology of the Indian Subcontinent 1872-1992. National Museum of Natural History. Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. pp.330.
- Natarajan, V. & Balasubramanian, P. (1992): Dew bathing by Purple-rumped Sunbird *Nectarinia zeylonica* (Linn.). *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 89 (3): 377-378.

Internet References:

- 1. <http://besgroup.talfrynature.com/2008/12/26/scarlet-backed-flowerpecker-taking-a-leaf-bath/>
- 2. <http://besgroup.talfrynature.com/2009/06/08/rufous-tailed-tailorbird-takes-a-leaf-bath/>
- 3. <http://www.backyardnature.net/mexnat/dew-bath.htm>

Front Cover : 1- Coppersmith Barbet (*Megalaima haemacephala*), 2 - India Roller (*Coracias benghalensis*), 3 - Black Drongo (*Dicrurus macrocercus*), 4 - Indian Hanging Parrot (*Loriculus vernalis*)
All photographs by Shivadarshan Balse

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