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## Nesting of Lesser Goldenback in Vadodara

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### Introduction

The Lesser Goldenback (*Dinopium benghalense*), which is also known as Black-rumped Flameback or Lesser Golden-backed Woodpecker, is a resident species of the Indian Subcontinent (Grimmett *et al.* 1998, Ali 2002). It is a species of open, dry or wet tropical forest, plantation, well-wooded gardens, open woodland and is commonly found around human settlements, avoiding dense forests (Arlott 2014, Gorman 2014). It is a 'Least Concern' species as the population trend is stable (BirdLife International 2018). Though the male and female look similar, the adult male has a red crown and crest, while female has black fore-crown spotted with white, and red hind-crown and crest (Grimmett *et al.* 1998, Ali 2002, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012, Arlott 2014). In India, its nesting season is reported to be from February to August but varies with the weather conditions (Ali 2002, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). The Lesser Goldenback is known to nest inside a tree cavity, which might be a natural hollow or the nest is entirely excavated by the birds. The eggs are laid simply on wood chips at the bottom of the nesting cavity. There are previous records of Lesser Goldenback occupying a nest box (Osmaston 1922) as well as nesting in an earthen wall (Singh 1997). Santharam (1997) has observed the species nesting in a cavity after usurping a nest of a Yellow-crowned Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos mahrattensis*), suggesting the opportunistic and readily adaptive behaviour of the bird.

The Lesser Goldenback is a common resident in Gujarat (Ganpule 2016). We observed its nesting from mid-April to early June at Sayaji Baug (22° 18' 45.45" N, 73° 11' 22.34" E), located in Vadodara city, Gujarat.

### Observations

From 15 April 2018 to 25 April 2018, we observed that three Lesser Goldenback were frequently involved in chasing each other early in the morning, accompanied by squeaky calls in between, which seemed to be their pre-breeding behaviour. They would occasionally peck on the trunks of trees amid the chase, called 'drumming', attracting a mate and claiming territory. After the courtship rituals, the pair selected a nesting cavity in the trunk of *Mitragyna parviflora* tree - 'Kalam' or 'Kalo Kadamb' in Gujarati - (22° 19' 02.39" N, 73° 11' 16.38" E) in a vertical hollow created by a fallen branch growing out of the main trunk. The opening was carved out wide by the pair as per their requirement. The height of the tree was 15.8 mts, canopy cover 34.7%, dbh 1.61 mts and nest-hole height was 8.7 mts. The eggs were probably laid around 4 May 2018, as the female was seen in the cavity for many hours for the first time. On 15 May 2018, we could observe the male and female frequently making visits to the cavity, carrying food material to feed the hatchlings. We used to observe the cavity from 06:00 – 08:00 hrs and 17:00 – 18:00 hrs daily, because this was the time during which the pair was observed to be very actively involved in caring for the young ones. In early morning of 21 May 2018, two juveniles were seen peeping out of the cavity while their parents took turns to guard the cavity one after the other. The female was seen coming down on to the ground and collecting ants to feed the young ones. After feeding, she sat in the cavity. After sometime, the male came with food, gave a call, after which the female came out and then fed the young. Both the parents were observed guarding the cavity. The juveniles were slightly duller than the parents. The nestlings fledged but remained inside the cavity and finally on 4 June 2018, both the juveniles left the nest.

## Discussion

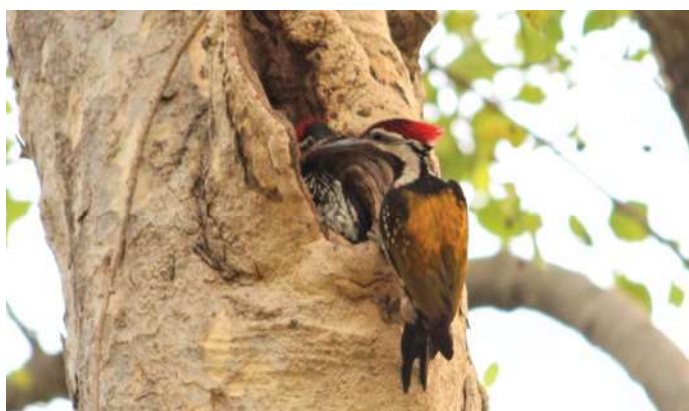
Though the Lesser Goldenback is a widely distributed species, the nesting and breeding of the species has not been studied in great detail. We observed that the incubation period here was probably around 11 days, which agrees with the previous observations made in Konkan, Maharashtra (Katdare *et al.* 2006). Ali & Ripley (2001) give the incubation period as 'undetermined' while Winkler & Christie (2018) give it as 17-19 days. But here, our observation of an incubation period of around 11 days was shorter than what is given in the reference texts and similar to the observations made in Maharashtra.



Female feeding young ones



Female guarding the cavity while the male was out collecting food



Male feeding the young ones

The fledging period here was around 20 days, when the chicks left the nest and were seen flying short distances. The fledging period for the species is around 3 weeks (Winkler & Christie 2018). The fledging period observed by us was similar to what is given in the reference texts.

No data is available on the breeding success of this species. Here, we observed that the breeding was successful and both the chicks fledged. It is also interesting to note that the species is thriving in a populated city like Vadodara.

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