

Observations of White-browed Fantail mobbing birds of prey

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its position while being attacked. After some time, the buzzard flew away from the area. But the fantail continued to chase the buzzard in the air till it flew far off.

The same kind of scene was observed in Jambughoda Wildlife Sanctuary, Vadodara, on 12 April 2014. Here, the White-browed Fantail mobbed a Crested Serpent Eagle (*Spilornis cheela*).

A pair of fantails was mobbing the eagle, which had perched on a tree. Only one fantail actively engaged in attacking the eagle. Rapid and frequent attacks by the fantail made the eagle uncomfortable. The eagle often raised its crest while getting pecked. After a few minutes, the eagle flew away from the tree but the fantails continued chasing it for some distance.

According to Ali & Ripley (2001), the White-browed Fantail breeds from February to August, but chiefly during March to June. These two observations were during its breeding season. So, it is possible that the birds became more aggressive. Ali & Ripley (2001) further state that the species is usually unafraid of man and aggressive in mobbing predators such as cats and crows, trespassing into proximity of nests, and utter harsh, shriek-like 'war-cries'. It is also known to attack intruding crows approaching their nests (Tyabji 1964). Singh (1964) observed that the incubating bird did not leave the nest even when the author tried to push it away from the nest and when he covered the nest with his hand, the bird started attacking and pecking at the hand. There are many photos of fantails mobbing prey birds on birding websites in India (Shetty 2009, Nagendra 2014)

This kind of mobbing of the much larger Oriental Honey-buzzard and Crested Serpent Eagle proves its aggressive behavior during the breeding season.

References:

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On the morning of 7 July 2013, at Chikodra village (22°33' N, 72°59' E), near Anand, we observed a pair of Oriental Honey-buzzards (*Pernis ptilorhynchus*) soaring in the sky. Sometime later, one of the buzzards perched on a Neem tree. In a few moments, a White-browed Fantail (*Rhipidura aureola*) appeared and started attacking it by pecking the much larger bird. The fantail mostly sat on back of the buzzard and pecked on the nape and head of the buzzard. The fantail attacked frequently and quickly through the air. Sometimes, the fantail tried to get close to the head of the buzzard and attacked it on or near its face. Though it was undisturbed initially, the continued and aggressive pecking made the buzzard uncomfortable.

After a few minutes, the buzzard flew away from the tree. But the fantail chased it and continued attacking again as soon as it settled on a nearby light post. Here, the fantail became more aggressive in the open space, but the buzzard kept on stretching its wings (or opened them partially) to drive away the fantail from its back. Also, the buzzard kept on changing