

## **UNUSUAL BEHAVIOR OF GREY HORNBILLS *OCYCEROS BIROSTRIS* (SCOPOLI, 1786) VISITING PAPAYA TREES**

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*Reviewer: Peter Smetacek*

We have three papaya (*Carica papaya*) trees on the edge of our lawn in Vasant Vihar (30°19'29.2"N, 77°59'57.9"E; 644 m amsl), Dehradun, Uttarakhand. Every season we get plenty of papayas and now the trees are more than two meters high with a dense canopy of big green leaves. Many a times we were surprised to see small pieces of leaves scattered around the trees and the papaya tree completely denuded of leaves. There were many papaya fruits on the tree but they were left undisturbed.

With mobile and DSLR cameras ready, we started observing papaya trees on a regular basis. One morning, we saw that Grey Hornbills (*Ocyeroceros birostris*) were sitting on the papaya trees and were munching merrily on the papaya leaves. They were not interested in the papaya fruits. They had not taken even a single exploratory bite of the fruits.

We found that these birds are very smart. They ate all the leaves and the denuded tree was left undisturbed for a few days. Once the trees recovered their leaves, the birds again congregated and ate all the leaves.

The present note only seeks to draw attention to this behavior of Grey Hornbills. Further studies by scientists and ornithologists can lead to an understanding of the reason behind Grey Hornbills eating papaya leaves, whether there are specific attractants in the leaves and why they ignore papaya fruits.



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