

A REPORT ON PREDATION OF CHESTNUT-TAILED STARLING *STURNIA MALABARICA* (GMELIN, 1789) ON A *HEMIDACTYLUS* GOLDFLUS, 1820 (GEKKONIDAE) SPECIES FROM ANDAL BLOCK, WEST BENGAL, INDIA

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Chestnut-tailed Starling *Sturnia malabarica* belonging to the Sturnidae family is a resident in the north-eastern part of the Indian Subcontinent and a summer visitor to the Western and Central Himalayas (Grimmett et al., 2011). It also occurs as a winter visitor to most of southern India (Grimmett et al., 2011). *S. malabarica* is a slim bird of medium size (21 cm) with silvery-grey upperparts, dull rufous till breast, and brighter below; wings are black and grey; both sexes are alike (Grewal et al., 2016). The reported food of *S. malabarica* includes ber, lantana and other berries, banyan and peepul figs, nectar, and insects (Ali, 2002).

During an opportunistic survey on 15 June 2022, the author photographed an adult *S. malabarica* (Figs. 1 & 2) preying on a gecko of *Hemidactylus* sp. at around 03:58 p.m. from the Village Dubchururia (23.58°N, 87.23°E; 112m asl) of Andal block situated at Paschim Bardhaman district, West Bengal, India. The author observed that the bird caught something from the bush and flew off and after that, it sat on the roof of a nearby building and swallowed the gecko. Nikon D5300

camera with Nikkor Af-P 70–300mm lens was used for photo documentation of the incident. The gecko was identified as the species of the genus *Hemidactylus* by Daniel (2002). The present study area is a semi-urban area with agricultural fields and remnants of dry deciduous forests with more than 10 large water bodies.

Birds of the Sturnidae family are known as bio-controlling agents in the agricultural world (Rahman, 2019). Studies on food habits and feeding behaviour of Chestnut-tailed Starling *S. malabarica* has not been carried out in India however Rahman (2019) studied it in Bangladesh. Diet plays a significant role in bird ecology (Duraes & Marini, 2003). The study on feeding ecology helps to understand the community structure, co-existence, and resource use pattern in its habitat (Asokan & Ali 2010; Kaur & Kler 2018). Chestnut-tailed Starling *S. malabarica* are omnivorous and the diet constituted 67.15% animal matter, 20.53% plant matter, and 12.32% food waste as shown by Rahman (2019). Animal diets included insect larvae (39%), beetles (16%), dragonflies (7%), damselflies (3%), and

worms (2%) (Rahman, 2019). Though the present report the author suggesting that the Chestnut-tailed Starling *S. malabarica*, is becoming an opportunistic predator and recommending a detailed study on ecology of such commonly found birds.

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Figure 1: Chestnut-tailed Starling captured a Gecko (*Hemidactylus* sp.)



Figure 2: Chestnut-tailed Starling preying on a Gecko (*Hemidactylus* sp.)