

Group clashes, number game and gang rape (?) in Jungle Babblers (*Turdoides striatus*)

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In this article we have tried to describe some of our observation about the behaviour of Jungle Babblers *Turdoides striatus* and their behaviour in relation to other bird species. These observations are a compilation taken over a period of time and hence the dates are mentioned with all the observations. Andrews and Naik (1965, 1970) has done a great work on the behaviour of the species. Acharya (1951) have reported pecking by the species at their own reflections.

The intra-specific group clashes and the number game:

On 4th June 2007, one of us (Raju) was observing Jungle Babblers at Maharajbagh garden in Nagpur city. It seemed like there were two groups of Babblers, one group was of 16 birds (according to facial orientation) at the time of fight. At once there was a group clash between the two groups. Any babbler looked to be attacking any babbler by pouncing on it. There was lot of calling. While attacking the babbler keeps it's bill wide open. All body feathers are fluffed, wings are kept open with quivering or flicking and fanning of tail (presumably flaunting itself to be a strong and big). Many jumped and clashed in air. However, within seconds members of one group started retreating with toned down aggression calls and still threatening with open gape and open wings. One group withdrew hopping still maintaining the tempo as if they are not defeated. The attack or even fleeing involves only hopping and never involve resorting to strong flight. We did not observe any serious injuries after the fight. Unfortunately in this group clash, we were not able to count the members in the second group, as they got messed up in the clash.

On 25th June 2007 again one of us observed (Raju) a group clash of Jungle Babblers at the same place. There was lot of ruckus, there were two groups of three and six babblers approaching each other with aggressive postures as described above. But the three started retreating before the six could actually attack them. Six more babblers arrived to the side of the three joining them and making them a total of nine (versus). This same group, which was retreating few moments before, came back and started hopping towards the group of six. Now the group, which was

looking stronger a few moments before stated retreating with open gapes and calls.

But then finally these two groups clashed. They pounced on one another, clasped each other's talons, dashed to each other mid-air (1-2 feet above ground), fell down holding each other's talons firmly and frantically pecking at each other's.

In these incidences the group of Babblers with smaller number strength retreated, which could be an indication that they either understand the statistics or the importance of having more members in winning a group clash.

Inter-specific clashes with Brahminy Myna (Starling) and the number game:

On 26th June 2008 Raju was observing birds near a tea kiosk and some Jungle Babblers and Brahminy Mynas (*Sturnus pagodarum*) were foraging nearby. At 0826 hours he saw one Brahminy Myna and a Jungle Babbler fighting. They jumped into air and dashed against each other. In moments another Brahminy Myna jumped into the clash and started pecking at the lone Babbler. Immediately the Babbler retreated and flew away.

Just after two minutes, Raju saw that again one Babbler and one Myna were fighting. They rolled over one another holding each other's talons and pecking at each other. But, this time another Babbler jumped into the fight. The first Babbler held the Myna immobilized and the second Babbler pecked at the Myna all over her body. Soon the Myna escaped somehow and flew away. In these two instances both Myna and Babbler seems to have understood that the power of two is more than one!

Black-hooded Oriole (*Oriolus xanthornus*) and Jungle Babbler's nest:

On 25th May 2007 Raju located a nest of Jungle Babblers on a small tree in Maharajbagh Garden, which was being constructed. In 15 minutes at least three Babblers did a total of 9 sorties to the nest with nesting material. The three Babblers sat in the nest alternately. Raju saw a Black-hooded Oriole (*Oriolus xanthornus*) lingering around. The Babblers chased it away. But at 0842 hours the Oriole approached and inspected the Babbler nest when the Babblers were not around! Again on 29th May 2007, a Black-hooded Oriole arrived near the nest of the Jungle Babblers. It called few times its regular calls, then called "squak...squak" a few times, inspected the nest and flew. I still wonder at the inquisitive nature of the Black-hooded Oriole. After some time at 0917 hours the Babblers attacked an approaching House Crow *Corvus splendens* and pecked on its face.

Gang rape or Forced Mating:

On 28th May 2007 Anil was observing the group of Jungle Babblers below the nesting tree described in the above paragraph. He noted that four or five babblers were chasing one particular Babbler, which in turn was hopping and encircling and running around the small tree trunk. But soon they pounced upon the one running and forced it to squat and stay immobilized. At this moment one of the babblers mounted on the back of this immobile babbler and forcibly mated with it!

On searching the literature we found that gang rape is reported in birds (Bagemihl, 1999). This also could be described as forced copulation or mating.

References:

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Recommended citation:

Kasambe, R. & Pimplapure, A. (2008): Group clashes, number game and forced mating in Jungle Babblers (*Turdoides striatus*). *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 48 (4): 57-58.