

HABITAT MANAGEMENT OF MIHINTALE SANCTUARY THROUGH AN INDICATOR SPECIES

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This study was carried out as a case study to identify the impacts of the foraging ecology of the birds on the selected eco-system. As an indicator bird species, the Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*) was selected, as it is a common bird species often recorded in the study site. . It is a resident arboreal species commonly found in gardens and in forest. It is non-territorial, and can occur in pairs or large flocks. The Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer* is very widely distributed throughout the Indian sub-continent, and divided into seven races. Red vented bulbuls are also considered as pests because of their habit of damaging fruit crops. Observations were taken from January to May, 2011 daily, along a transect of 300m in length and 50m width. Scan 15 sampling method was used to observe the foraging behaviour. An individual was observed for 15 minutes continuously and with a 5 minute break another individual was observed for 15 minutes. No counts were made during heavy rains. For each foraging attempt, microhabitat details such as height above the ground, substrate from which food is taken and the plant species used for feeding was recorded. According to the results, it was clearly showed that the 59% of insects consumed by *Pycnonotus cafer* , 22% of fruits and others are less than 5%, consumed by this species. The dominant plant utilized for feeding by *Pycnonotus cafer* is *Asadirachta indica* and it is 34.93% .And the dominant plant utilized for resting is, *Schleichera oleosa* and it is 45.7% . According to the survey in the Mihintale sanctuary there were very few number of *Pycnonotus cafer* preferred trees available due to illegal felling. Hence the findings of this study can be used for the habitat refreshment of the ecosystem. As a result of the study, the foraging ecology of the indicator species *Pycnonotus cafer* in the study site was identified and it can be used for ecosystem management ,and for the conservation of both birds and plants found in the Mihinthale Sanctuary.
