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ASPECTS OF FORAGING STRATEGIES OF INDIAN PITTA (*Pitta brachyura*) IN TROPICAL WET EVERGREEN FORESTS OF SABARAGAMUWA PROVINCE, SRI LANKA

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ABSTRACT

Indian pitta (*Pitta brachyura*) is a remarkable winter visitor in Sri Lanka. It breeds in Northern parts of India and migrates to South India and Sri Lanka in the winter. Although this species is included in folktales from centuries ago, there is inadequate data on ecological aspects as its foraging ecology. The objectives of this study were to determine searching behaviour, attack behaviour, foraging sites, food types and food handling techniques of *P. brachyura*. The study was conducted in the Tropical Wet Evergreen Forest of Kiriporuwa village (6° 48' 53" N, 80° 14' 13" E) in Sabaragamuwa Province, Sri Lanka. Data collection was conducted from 0630h to 1830h within the migratory season from August 2018 to April 2019. Data collection was carried out in three line transects (100 m × 10 m) using binoculars (Nikon Monarch, 12 × 42, Japan). An ethogram was constructed by using observational data. The behaviours for searching food, attacking food, food handling techniques, foraging site and food types were categorized. Diurnal time duration was divided into two-hour time periods. Foraging behaviour was maximum in 1631h – 1830h time period. Hopping (73%) was recorded as the major foraging-site movement. Gleaning attack method was performed to capture prey items. They foraged primarily on ground with leaf litter. In many observations they mashed their food items while feeding. They consumed primarily animal food, especially invertebrates including beetle larvae, termites, dragonflies, centipedes, millipedes, arachnids and gastropods. Moreover, they consumed amphibians only in rare occasions. Infrequently they fed on fruits and moss. Habitat destruction for plantations and human settlements is the major threat. Feral cats and dogs also attack Indian Pitta. Usage of hazardous chemicals as pesticides also decreases food availability. Decades ago sightings of these birds were very common in the migratory season. However, the overall population trend is considered to be decreasing. Therefore, conservation programs should be planned to ensure the protection of *P. brachyura*.

KEY WORDS: Foraging, Indian Pitta (*Pitta brachyura*), Migratory bird, Tropical Wet Evergreen Forests, Sabaragamuwa Province, Sri Lanka