
NATURE NOTE

Feeding the Birds

A slightly longer than usual period of stay during September 1998 at the Asa Wright Nature Centre enabled me to make some more detailed observations at the Centre's feeding station, to which previously I had tended to pay little attention. It is of course an important part of the Centre's attraction for human visitors, and great care (and some expense) is given to seeing that supplies for the birds and other creatures are kept up.

At several platform feeders pieces of fruit, mainly banana and pawpaw, are provided, along with bread and other tit-bits discarded from the kitchen, while there are nearly a dozen "hummingbird" feeders dispensing sugar-water for hummingbirds, Bananaquits and various honeycreepers. The mixture is five parts of water to one of brown sugar, and although I have been concerned that the lack of protein in this might adversely affect hummingbird nestlings fed directly with this food collected by their mothers, the fact that the population appears to have remained stable over the years indicates that any such harm must be minimal.

It is interesting to see which species visit the feeders and which do not. Among honeycreepers the most numerous species to visit the nectar-feeders are Bananaquits, Purple Honeycreepers and Green Honeycreepers. Blue Dacnis and Red-legged Honeycreepers are infrequent, preferring insects and berries, while most of the latter species appear to leave the area for a few months during August to November.

Hummingbird visitors are mainly White-chested Emerald, Copper-rumped, White-necked Jacobin, along with Blue-chinned Sapphire, Black-throated Mango and Ruby-topaz occurring in much smaller numbers, the latter two absent usually from August to

November. The Tufted Coquette and Long-billed Starthroat are attracted by the vegetation (and maybe by the presence of other birds), but I have never seen them feed at the feeders. Among the hermits the Green seems to be the only one to use the feeders regularly, even though both Little and Rufous-breasted are seen nearby feeding at flowers, mainly of *Sanchezia*.

Among tanagers the most prevalent at the feeders are Blue-gray, Palm, White-lined and Silver-beaked, but although others, such as Bay-headed and Turquoise, and Violaceous Euphonia, are present nearby, they don't seem to go to the feeders. The Yellow Oriole mostly feeds on fruit, whilst a heterogeneous collection of other birds mostly go for the bread. They include Ruddy Ground-Dove, Cocoa and Bare-eyed Thrush, Tropical Mockingbird, Shiny Cowbird and Grayish Saltator; while a few others seem omnivorous (and greediest), such as Crested Oropendola, Great Kiskadee and Blue-crowned Motmot.

Perhaps the most unexpected visitors are the Chestnut Woodpecker (a great favourite with bird-watchers) and both Barred and Great Antshrikes. Although these species are known mostly as feeders on invertebrates, they follow the motmot in having a preference for larger animal prey (even including sometimes the nestlings of other birds). Certainly I have never known such a concentration of Great Antshrikes as can be found at the Nature Centre, very likely as a result of this bonanza at the feeding tables.

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