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Food Preferences and Feeding Habits of Indian Birds

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Introduction

The birds are varied in their food choices and feeding habits and this study provides an insight to the varied food types and feeding habits of the different species of birds found very commonly in different suburbs and urban regions in India. The birds are considered to be the specialist architect of any ecosystem. They act as pollinators, helping in the blooming of millions of flowers and dispersal of seeds of various fruit-bearing plants which when grow-up form ecological hotspot for diverse species of fauna. They perform a very significant role in the food chains and maintain consistency of any ecosystem. Thus, the birds that are so important components of an ecosystem need to be conserved and their habitats protected for maintaining ecological balance and revival of lost forests and thus, our 'Nature'

Anatomical and physiological differences

Birds have no teeth, so foods are not chewed at all. They have gizzards and crop. Crops are dialation of esophagus and are a storage organ; size of crop varying according to eating habits of the bird it is large in herbivorous and no crop or smaller in carnivorous birds. The gizzard is specialized organ for grinding. It is more muscular in herbivorous than carnivorous. Birds have proventriculus similar to the similar glandular simple stomach to mammals. Liver is bilobed and Gall bladders are present in some birds but absent in pigeon.



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Mode of Eating and drinking

Feeding and drinking are the dangerous occupation for birds, since the birds may concentrate upon it. Many birds eat their prey in whole and some other birds of prey tear up larger prey with their beaks. In herbivorous birds the crop is advantageous because it enables the bird to feed in an exposed site for a very short period and then to retire at a safer place where it can digest the collected food. Some birds may obtain their water from foods; some birds may satisfy their needs from the rains or dew by sipping drops from the vegetation.

Domestic hen – it drinks water by the beak is lowered into the water, the mouth filled and the head raised so that the water runs down the throat. Some other birds like pigeon and quails are able to drink by dipping the beak into the water and suck it up with pumping suction.

Sea birds- sea birds face difficulties to take water, since the available water is very salty. When they drink sea water the salt transported through the blood to the nose where it is transferred to large nasal glands and eliminated. Drops of highly concentrated salt run to the tip of the bill and are shaken off with a flick of the head.

Birds are herbivores, carnivores and omnivores

Herbivorous birds may be seed eater or fruit eater. Seed eater birds are duck, Game bird, pigeon, parrot and wood peckers, tits and crow. Seed eater birds have powerful gizzard with a good supply of grit and usually possesses a crop. Many seed eater birds such as Ducks and pigeons take only smaller seeds without strong coverings. The large parrots and macaws can crack very large seeds with great ease. Hawpinchs which spens cherry and olive stanes to get the seed inside have powerful skulls and beaks with extremely large muscles and the mandible becomes ossified.

Fruit eaters (Frugivorous): Fruit eating birds eat a diet that is poor in nutrition and just attract the birds. Fruits are often relatively large in size and as a result many of the fruit eating species have wide bills and gap enabling them to swallow the fruit whole and small seeds are passed through the digestive system and large seeds become regurgitated. Fruit eating birds are manikins, cotingids, fruit pigeons and oil birds.

Mucivorous birds feed on the mucus of plants and trees, namely sap. Woodpeckers, waxwings, kinglets, and warblers all have a mucivorous component to their diets. Birds may drill into trees to release sap to sip, or they may take advantage of larger wounds on trees to access sap with less effort. Other birds will pick insects out of sap, but don't eat the sap and wouldn't be considered mucivor.



Carnivorous birds (Flesh eating birds): It may be insect eater, fish eaters and birds of prey.

Insect eaters (Insectivorous): Insect eater birds having specialized structures such as birds with study bills and the birds such as bee eaters huge gap or long pointed bills. Weed peckers drill holes into the burrow of beetle larvae and withdraw it with their long tongue.

Fish eaters (Piscivorous): Fish eating birds such as Pelicans, Herons, Grebes, Penguins, gulls, skimmers, ducks and kingfishers are feed predominantly on fish. The darters have two specially adopted neck vertebrae which enable them to catch their prey more easily. Long neck of Herons enables them to reach forward a greater distance when strike to prey.

Birds of prey: Birds of prey are used their bills and talons for grasping their prey and positioning of the eye facing wall forward that increases the stereoscopic vision. The largest prey of birds is the eagles, Condons and Vultures. Vultures' food only in freshly dead prey and they do not carry food in their feet. Their smelling power is very strong and locates decomposing bodies very easily. Falcons are fast flying birds and many of them swoop on to their prey. The owls have exceptionally good night vision and ear placed asymmetrically on the head which helps them locate the sound with greater accuracy. To increase its chance of striking its prey the owls spread its talons along the direction of prey is moving.

Omnivorous (Animal and plant eating birds): The term omnivorous describes the diet of many birds – eating everything and anything. Ducks are well-known omnivores, and many birds will at least sample other types of food even if they prefer one type of diet more exclusively. To be considered omnivorous, a bird should have a widely varied diet and eat all types of foods, rather than showing just a few strong preferences.

Ophiophagus (Snake eating birds): An Ophiophagus bird is a snake-eater, a specialized type of skilled carnivore. The snake eagle families of birds are Ophiophagus, and the secretary bird is one of the most well-known snake-eating birds. Many larger wading birds, such as herons and egrets, will also eat any snakes they can catch. Raptors, including hawks and owls, will also catch and eat snakes.

The woodpeckers were found to be solitary species and extensively fed on the small insects like ants, termites and larvae of other insects, fruits and sap from these trees.

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