

**OBSERVATIONS ON THE BEHAVIOUR OF THE
SOUTHERN COMMON BABBLER *TURDOIDES AFFINIS TAPROBANUS*
IN THE CAMPUS OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF PERADENIYA, SRI LANKA**

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The Southern Common Babbler *Turdoides affinis taprobanus* is a very common bird in Sri Lanka. It lives in flocks ranging in size from 4 to 20 (seldom exceeding 20) birds. Each flock maintains a home range that varies from 1 – 11 ha. They show various types of behaviour not only within the flock (intra-specific behaviour) but also with other bird species (inter-specific behaviour). Intra-specific behaviour includes, spatial behaviour (such as movements in space range, hopping, resting, perching), maintenance behaviour (manipulation of body including preening, stretching, bathing, sun-bathing, scratching, sleeping, shaking), nutritional behaviour (foraging and feeding), agonistic behaviour (physical interactions such as fighting, playing and communicative interactions such as vocalization), sexual behaviour (songs, mating, courtship, copulation, territorial defense), nesting behaviour (nest-building, egg-laying, incubation) and parental behaviour (brooding, nourishing, feeding the young by bringing food such as larval and adult insects). Most of these behaviour types are common among other species of birds as well as in the common babbler. But certain behaviour patterns, such as preening and feeding for instance, are different from other birds and are very interesting. Preening includes nibbling with the tip of the bill that may remove foreign matter and ectoparasites. The birds sit on tree branches and preen especially in between feeding. There are two types of preening, allopreening and autopreening. When several individuals are clumped together they often perch facing the same or opposite directions and preen each other. This type of preening is called allopreening. But some individuals move a little away from the group and do self-preening. This is called autopreening. The southern common babbler is an omnivore and it forages in groups of varying size. They feed mainly on insects, vegetable matter and some fruits. They also feed on wild figs, waste rice and curry, and bread thrown out of the houses, canteens.

Mainly their two types of inter-specific behaviour types: with the competitors and with the predators. Mainly they forage with squirrels and common mynahs. They share the same feeding ground and do not show any serious fights because of the high abundance of food and wide food habits of babblers. The predator-babbler relationship is different: the babblers become aggressive towards their predators such as rat snakes, cats, and dogs that enter their territory.

The behaviour patterns and the activities of the Southern Common Babbler vary according to the changes in the weather. On sunny days they are very active and forage through the entire day (0630 to 1700 h) while on rainy days, they are less active and hence, their foraging time is much less. They are not aggressive. These birds spend most of their time foraging on the ground. The habitats of the Southern Common Babbler in the University Campus include home gardens, grasslands, pine forests, and woodlands. Of these, home gardens are the most preferred type of habitat. This is due to the high abundance of food such as waste rice, curry and bread.