Diet of the Silvery-cheeked HornbillBycanistes brevis during the breeding season in the East Usambara Mountains, Tanzania

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Abstract

The breeding season diet and nesting characteristics of the Silvery-cheeked HornbillBycanistes brevis are poorly known. To further understand these aspects of the breeding biology of this hornbill species, 14 nests were studied in and around Amani Nature Reserve located in the East Usambara Mountains, Tanzania. Nesting tree species were identified and the diet composition of nesting hornbills was evaluated between July and November 2001. The ejecta from each nest were collected, inventoried, identified (as completely as possible) and enumerated. Food items were categorised as plant, vertebrate or invertebrate. Plants, represented largely by fruits, were the dominant food type (n = 861), followed by invertebrates (n = 306; mainly millipedes and beetles), and vertebrates (n = 15; mainly smaller birds and chameleons). A comparison of results from the current study to other nesting observations made approximately seven decades earlier in the same area suggest that (1) the invasive tree species Maesopsis eminii, which was the most common food type consumed (n = 4 539 seeds), has become a favoured new food source in the breeding season, and (2) the breeding season appears to have shifted to an earlier period, potentially due to the fruiting phenology and abundance ofMaesopsis eminii.