

# Dismantling and shifting of nest, a rare behaviour of Ashy prinia (*Prinia socialis skyes*)

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Ashy prinia (*Priniya socialis skyes*) is small sparrow size bird. Distributed throughout the Indian union Pakistan; Bangladesh; Sri Lanka; Up to 1500m in the Himalayas and 2000m in South India (Ali 2002). The nesting season ranges from March to September but more commonly starts immediately after the onset of the monsoon. It is known to build two types of nest (Ali 2002, George 1962)

## **Type 1** – Tailor bird like Nest (*Orthotomus sutorius*)

A soft cup like structure lined with spongy materials and is placed in thick foliage and the leaves used to hold the nest have the upper surfaces outwards so that the nest is difficult to spot.

**Type 2**— Nest woven around the twigs: An oblong purse of woven fibers, Tacked and bound with cobweb to the supporting leaves of low bush (Ali 2002; George 1962, Dharmakumarsinghi, 1955)

We found a nest of Ashy prinia in Amravati woven in between the twigs of *Tulsi*, Holy basil (*Ocimum tenuiflorum*) plant approximately of height 3 feet tall. However here a third type of nest was observed (George 1962), which is less common. Here the bag of fiber was attached to slender twigs of Holy basil plant (*Ocimum tenuiflorum*), instead of leaves. We sited 3 eggs inside the nest on 8th of August. The eggs were orange red in colour and of small clutch type. The incubation period was about 12 days (Ali 2002) and on 20th August three juvenile were sited in the nest. The developmental progression after hatching took place normally. On 30th of August in the morning hours, nest was found empty. We went on for finding the young ones in the nearby bushes of our garden, but failed to find any traces of the young ones. Soon after a while the bird visited the nest carrying food in the beak, after finding the nest empty the alarming behaviour was well noted. The pair kept on visiting the place for few hours and than a distinctive and very rare behaviour was noted. The pair of Ashy prinia started dismantling the nest. The earlier note of such behaviour is also known (George 1962), though in the earlier observation, the nest was shifted when the eggs were not laid. Such behaviour of shifting the nest could be observed when the bird is discovered during the process of nest making, consequently the bird might move the building block to another site (Birdwatcher's Bane Zafar Futehally Indian Express, April 5 1987)

We kept the track of the birds while they were dismantling the nest. The cobweb and some fibers were removed bit by bit and the complete nest was rebuilt at a nearby plant of *Vinca* (*Catharanthus roseus*). The *vinca* plants are sufficiently taller and provide more crown of leaves that proves to be an excellent shelter.

In the recent years Ornithologists in the city of Mumbai have observed an unusual change in the nesting habits of a few bird species. Ashy Prinia, Common Tailorbird, Red-vented Bulbul, Red-whiskered Bulbul and Purple-rumped Sunbird are usually known to nest at lower heights. However, these have been found to be nesting in the upper branches of trees in some localities (*Excerpt from Times Of*

*India*, by Simi t Bhagat, TNN Mar 13, 2011, 12.39am IST).

This behaviour might have been developed to avoid and reduce predation on the nest by domestic cats, which are not uncommon for any locality. Cats are known to be a major cause of bird mortality. Domestic cats are agile and can easily attack nests that are not so high (*Excerpt from Times Of India*, by Simi t Bhagat, TNN Mar 13, 2011, 12.39 am IST). Nests of Common Tailorbird and Ashy Prinia have been spotted in the large leaves of money plant, a climber, nearly 30 feet above the ground (*Excerpt from Times Of India*, by Simit Bhagat, TNN Mar 13, 2011, 12.39am IST). In our observation, though the nest was rebuilt on *vinca* plant, but the nests remain empty and no eggs were laid. The reason behind the shifting of nest and selection of sight can be anticipated as an act of mitigating the predatory threats. Such a behaviour could be an indication of increased in the number of predatory species.

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