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MAMMAL-ASSOCIATED PERCHING IN YELLOW-BELLIED GREENBUL *CHLOROCICHLA FLAVIVENTRIS*

Craig T. Symes

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AVIAN BEHAVIOUR

MAMMAL-ASSOCIATED PERCHING IN YELLOW-BELLIED GREENBUL *CHLOROCICHLA FLAVIVENTRIS*

Craig T. Symes

School of Animal, Plant and Environmental Sciences, University of the Witwatersrand, Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, South Africa
e-mail: craig.symes@wits.ac.za

The Yellow-bellied Greenbul *Chlorocichla flaviventris* forages mainly in the lower strata for fruit and insects (Louw 2005). In addition, there is a close association of foraging on and with mammals; these include on Impala *Aepyceros melampus* (Steyn 1975; Johnson 1998), Common Duiker *Sylvicapra grimmia* (Vernon 1972; Chalton 1976), Nyala *Tragelaphus angasii* (Anon. 1968; Wallace & Wilson 1985; Kilpin 2005) (a further report is also likely Yellow-bellied Greenbul, Feely 1972), Klipspringer *Oreotragus oreotragus* (Roberts 1993; 1995), and Bushbuck *Tragelaphus scriptus* (Bennett 1991). Dell (2006) reports Yellow-bellied Greenbul gleaning for ticks on Giraffe *Giraffa camelopardalis*, Nyala, Impala and Warthog *Phacochoerus africanus*, mainly in winter months (but this account that also includes Red-winged Starling *Onychognathus morio* and Eastern Nicator *Nicator gularis* is not clear on the specifics regarding the bird-mammal association). Dean & MacDonald (1981) who comprehensively reviewed feeding associations of birds with mammals indicate Yellow-bellied Greenbul gleaning ectoparasites from Nyala, Impala, and Common Duiker.

On the 31 July 2016 (11h25), while walking on a trail through broad-leaved savanna at Klein Kariba Resort (between Bela Bela and Modimolle in Limpopo Province, South Africa; 24°50'44.1"S,

28°19'38.5"E, 1202 m a.s.l.), I startled a bushbuck doe in some well-wooded riparian growth. Hopping nearby on the ground was at least one Yellow-bellied Greenbul that appeared to be foraging in the leaf litter. Once one of the greenbuls was alerted to my presence it flew onto the bushbuck's rump, where it perched for approximately 5-10 seconds before being disturbed when I moved closer to get a photograph. The greenbul flew off when the doe disappeared in the undergrowth, and in the dense vegetation it was difficult to see if the association remained. The single image I managed to procure (with close up of the greenbul on the bushbuck's rump inset) is shown in Figure 1. The photograph shows the greenbul perched on the rump of the doe.



Figure 1. Yellow-bellied Greenbul *Chlorocichla flaviventris* perched on rump of female bushbuck *Tragelaphus scriptus*.

The consistently documented mutualistic interactions of Yellow-bellied Greenbul with a host of mammal species begs further research and with the widespread use of camera-traps in vegetation

where it is difficult to make observations, a number of questions may be worth addressing, e.g. 1) what is the relationship between Yellowbellied Greenbul abundance and that of the hosts with/on which they forage, 2) are there seasonal patterns where the relationship between host and commensal bird species is related to parasite load or general food availability (e.g. Coetzee 2010)? Furthermore, it might be possible to experimentally test this association, using tame (habituated) or taxidermic mounts of bushbuck, or smaller forest ungulates (e.g. Red Duiker *Cephalophus natalensis* or Blue Duiker *Cephalophus monticola*), to attract greenbuls (or other birds associated with these mammals; Dean and MacDonald 1981; Skead 1997; Symes et al. 2015; Campbell and Colyn 2017).

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