

bottle of milk daily and also gets some leaf-nests of ants when we can procure them. Besides this he is given custard or milk pudding such as sago, tapioca, etc. He grubs about apparently finding a lot to eat under flower pots and barrels and will burrow into an ant-hill and apparently find food. White-ants (termites) found under a stone or a log he will not look at, and he will not eat the ferocious little red ants commonly found in the garden, but he will lick up the inoffensive black ant. He relishes ant's eggs more than ants themselves and particularly loves those big leaf-nests of the red ant, with millions of ants and eggs. The large red ants out of these leaf-nests bite his stomach and get on to his face, so that he has to pause occasionally to scratch his abdomen or remove them from his face."

Dr. de Zilwa goes on to say "sometimes he appears very excitable and rolls himself in a puddle of mud or wraps himself round a stone or fallen coconut. I have wondered whether he might be suffering from sexual excitement at such times. . . . He enjoys a swim in a big bath-tub and often wallows in mud." Dr. de Zilwa has had his Pangolin for over 18 months and it has now grown considerably. It is interesting to note that it does not appear to relish white-ants (termites) which are believed to be its usual food and also that it prefers the leaf-nests of the large red-ant to any other food. It is possibly these leaf-nests which induce the animal to climb."

In his field notes relating to a female *M. pentadactyla* collected by Mr. J. P. Mills, I.C.S., for the Society's Mammal Survey in the Naga Hills (E. Burma), he remarks: 'Can burrow with amazing speed. Chang Nagas will only eat one if they can kill it before it has curled up sufficiently for its tongue to reach its genital organs. Otherwise the meat will be bitter.' EDS.]

XV.—THE BABBLER AS A BAROMETER

The following little incident with regard to the Common Babbler (*Argya caudata caudata*) might be of some interest to our members and I send it for what it is worth.

I was spending July in a Canal Bungalow in the Gujranwala District, and just in front of the verandah is a small Tun tree, not more than 20 feet in height. Every evening a flock of babblers arrived and settled down for the night on one of the lowest branches. I could easily have reached them from the ground with my raised hand.

It was most amusing to see them select their perch. Three or four would first of all make themselves comfortable and others would line up on either side, but invariably one or two appeared to be left out. They would not settle down at the end of the line but must needs try to get in the middle, by hopping about on the backs of those already there, which would resist the attempts. It usually ended in the interloper selecting a stray branch for himself and once there he, or she, hopped round and round as though extremely pleased with the choice and chirruping to the others. Sooner or

later one or two would leave their original perch and go and join it, thus upsetting the whole party, as one by one they would all follow. Then one would come back to the original spot and would be followed by the others. This happened every evening and at least three attempts were made to select the right spot, which invariably ended in their going back to exactly the same one each night, and every night two, or three would be left out of the party to sit by themselves elsewhere. There were nine in all.

They did not mind me at all and, once comfortably settled, would allow me to come immediately under them, and not 2 feet distant.

I noticed that normally they sat anyhow, i.e., two facing one way and the next in the opposite direction, and so on throughout the line.

On the 11th evening I noticed them all facing in the same direction, facing east. That evening there was a fairly heavy storm from the south-west but the prevailing wind was due east.

On the 14th there was another storm about midnight, and before I went to bed I had a look at my friends and found them all facing east again.

On the 24th there was not a cloud in the sky, and it was dead still, when the babblers went to roost, but I noticed they had all faced the east from the start, and there was not a single tail in that direction. I remarked to my servants that there was going to be a storm during the night and told them how I knew! Sure enough there was a colossal one with a wind that uprooted a good many trees in the vicinity. How the babblers weathered it I do not know, for their little tree, to say nothing of the tiny branch they sat on, must have been beaten down almost to the ground many times. However, next evening they were there again, all nine of them, and thereafter one or the other of my servants always come to see how the birds were sitting!

When sitting so close together it is obvious they cannot turn round to face any storm, but what happens should the wind change direction?

DHARMSALA Cantonment

C. H. DONALD.

August 5, 1928.

[Mr. Donald's notes on the babbler recall Mr. Meyer's observations on the peacock as a weather prophet. In his recently published book *Birds and Beasts of a Roman Zoo* (reviewed on p. 394 of this journal) which contains much interesting information on the behaviour of animals in captivity, Mr. Meyer recognizes three distinct calls in the peacock. Firstly, the well-known unmusical call, secondly a quavering note of alarm which his birds invariably used when they were disturbed by a tame cheetah which had a free run of the gardens and lastly a peculiar creaking cry, not so loud as the ordinary call, which always accurately foretold rain or thunder. As a weather prophet, Meyer considers the peacock superior to the tree-frog. Its peculiar cry is never deceptive, rain or thunder always follows shortly. Have any of our readers made a similar observation on the peacock in the wild state? EDS.]



Donald, C H. 1929. "The Babbler As a Barometer." *The journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 33, 442–443.

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