

### 3. Utilization of a Single Brief Termite Eruption by Predators

At 1745 hours on 7 July 1977 a small, brief eruption, or nuptial flight, of winged termites was observed issuing from a tiny aperture in soil beneath a raised building of the Phuket Marine Biological Center, Phuket Island, western peninsular Thailand. Torrential rain had been falling all day but ceased prior to the observations, leaving an overcast sky.

When first observed the termite eruption was attended by at least six Streak-eared Bulbuls *Pycnonotus blandfordi* (also known as Blandford's Bulbul) which were taking the insects in fluttering, swerving flight at from 30 cm to 5 m above ground. One of these birds had a begging fledgling close-by which it fed frequently with winged termites. A Pacific Barn Swallow *Hirundo tahitica* was also aerial feeding upon the termites. A Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* repeatedly flew from the ground to take a termite, and chased them upward from the ground up to 3 m to snatch them in flight. A Magpie Robin, *Copsychus saularis*, stood beside the point of eruption taking termites as they appeared, and also took several by chasing them in flight. House swifts, *Apus affinis*, were accumulating in the area, flying excitedly about feeding on the termites.

At 1820 hours the Magpie Robin left, but up to a dozen Streak-eared Bulbuls remained to repeatedly take termites. By this time a larger number of House Swifts and Pacific Swallows were present with an additional single small unidentified swift. Two Stripe-throated Bulbuls, *Pycnonotus finlaysoni*, were now feeding upon the termites, but were not as active or as fast in the air as the Streak-eared Bulbuls but were more usually flying up from ground or perch up to 1.5 m to take an insect.

A Puff-throated Babbler *Pellorneum ruficeps* appeared and took termites whilst hopping about the ground; flying up only twice to 30 or 60 cm to snatch a termite and land directly down again with its prey, unlike the bulbuls which would fly directly onto a perch after seizing a termite in flight.

At 1830 hours two Magpie Robins appeared and fed on the ground or by flying up to about 50 cm to snatch a termite and drop down again, much like the Puff-throated Babbler. Shortly after this time bird feeding activ-

ity had all but finished when a young Tokay or Gecko, *Gekko gecko* appeared on a wall and frantically snatched termites. At one point it jumped vertically downward a full meter, from the lower edge of a wall to the ground to capture a termite fluttering there, afterward quickly ascending a building support to return to its original position on the wall.

At 1842 hours, in shadowy twilight, a Magpie Robin flew out from a building at about 5 m high to snatch a flying termite before flying off; presumably to roost. At 1845 hours a large dragonfly (Insecta: Odonata) appeared and snatched a flying termite about 2 m above the ground. Lastly, at 1849 hours, a Large-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus macrurus* appeared and hawked flying termites at about 3 m above the ground. By this time it was quite dark, with just sufficient light to see the termites clearly against leaden clouds; and I terminated observations.

All birds observed appeared to swallow termites complete, including wings. Elsewhere (this issue) I describe further instances of aerial insect feeding by bulbul species. In total, then, during 65 min observation at a single small termite eruption, nine bird species, a reptile and an insect were seen to exploit this very temporary and irregular resource, BROMLEY (1948: The swarming of termites, *Malay Nat. J.* 3: 93-95) observing a large termite eruption at Kajang, Malaysia, however, reports the remarkable attendance of seventeen bird species; and reports other less interspecific congregations at additional eruptions. It is obviously well worth sitting and watching termite eruptions one might come across.

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