

Natural History Snippets

Brief reports by members based on their observations of nature

A Brief Encounter with Mrs. Tickell: *Cyornis tickelliae*

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Meet Mrs. Tickell, aka Tickle's Blue Flycatcher or *Cyornis tickelliae*, a spritely little bird found in our lowland wet zone forests. She was tending a nest in the forest patch by the side of my friend's Guest House in Yahalathanne, Kandy, and was very busy feeding her brood. A beautiful songbird, melodious with many metallic trills, whistles, and clicks in her repertoire. I was lucky to observe her from the three balconies on three levels overlooking the forest. I could not see the nest and didn't try to look for it, lest it would disturb the chicks.

Day one. 10.30 AM on our arrival, the morning feed.

A damselfly followed by a moth or small butterfly like a skipper followed up at regular intervals of about ten minutes with catches of dragonflies and butterflies. The male was shy and didn't come out in the open. I did not see him feeding the chicks, though he was often present on a shady branch close by, to be

joined by the female when she was not foraging. I wonder if males share feeding duties?



An offering for me?

She always alighted on the angle of the kitchen garden wall, sang with her mouth full of goodies, and dashed off around the corner to the nest beyond our boundary, and into the forest.

Day Two

I first saw her at seven AM with a skink in her beak. Next came a small butterfly followed by a green caterpillar. By then, I guess she had gotten used to me and perched facing me only 6' away. The last picture I got of her was with a berry in her

beak; my last sighting of her, too. Does the story have a sad ending?

After a late lunch, the householders retired to their rooms closing the back door. Sadly, Mrs. Tickell may have come down to the kitchen garden floor to forage for crumbs or insects. The vagrant cat we shooed away may have laid in wait undisturbed by us. A sad ending for a spritely little bird? Her mate was not seen on his customary roost in the avocado tree thereafter, but I do hope he fed the chicks. We didn't try to locate the nest but let nature take its course, with our hearts heavy, but thankful to have got to know her even briefly.



A skink served up for a hungry brood



Berries for afters