

Observation of the *Coereba flaveola* (Bananaquit) on Springfield Plantation feed habits,

Commonwealth of Dominica W. I.

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Abstract

Coereba flaveola (Bananaquit) feeds predominantly in the morning rather in the late afternoon. It concentrated mainly on the mangos and the bananas as its main diet according to the location site off the back porch of the stream house.

Introduction

Coereba flaveola (Bananaquit) is in the subfamily Coerebinae. It ranges in length from 10-13 cm and the upper part of the bird is black with the underbelly a bright yellow with a white strip on the back of each eye. Their beak is short and curved to adapt to nectar feeding and fruits. The song of the bird is 'zee-e-e-e-swees-te' and is repeated constantly (Evans 1993: 122). This bird is widely distributed throughout this region and its feeding habits should fluctuate with the time of day. They should predominantly feed in the morning then in the late afternoon.

Methods and Materials

For four days the Bananaquit was observed from the back porch of the stream house located at the Springfield Plantation on the island of Dominica (15° 20'N, 61° 22'W). The stream house was chosen because of the view of the cultivated land that leads to the Checkhall River. The cultivated habitat is predominantly *Carica papaya*, *Mangifera indica*, *Musa* sp., and the *Heliconia bihai*. The habitat surrounding the river is secondary deciduous forest but was not observed in the experiment. Two 3 hours segments were observed through binoculars beginning at 0700 hours to 1000 hours then in the late afternoon beginning at 1600 hours to 1900 hours so a comparison could be made with the foraging habits in the morning then in the late afternoon. The mid-morning was not observed because in prior research project this time frame showed almost no activity. The experiment took place at the beginning of the rainy season, June 2 through the June 6, except for on June 5th. The Bananaquit was observed feeding/foraging throughout this time to test the above hypothesis.

Results

Results are presented in Table 1 and Fig. 1.

Discussion

The number of birds decreased as the day progress with 49 birds feeding between 0700 to 0800 hours and 7 feeding in the late afternoon from 1800 to 1900 hours. The two dominant species it foraged on were the mangos (*Mangifera oleracea*) and the banana (*Musa sp.*). Since they are nectar feeders they were observed eating predominantly the Heliconia (*Heliconia bihai*). A larger number of birds were expected to be on the nectar producing plants but this was not the case. An explanation could be the over cultivated land with all the fruit trees, which are more abundant because they produce larger number of food. Also, the number of birds feeding on the bananas where low and this was expected because many of the bananas near the stream house where not ripe. An average over the 4 days period, during the morning 27 birds where spotted and 8 were spotted feeding in the late afternoon. The hypothesis was supported the time of days does affect their feeding habits.

This project seems very easy to do but it is hard to decide if the Bananaquit is foraging or feeding from the view of binoculars. For example, the royal palm (*Roystonea oleracea*) and the sweet orange (*Citrus sp.*) where observed but it not accurate to say that they where eating the plants. It might have been eating insects or taking care of a nest. According to Kim Ostiguin the Bananaquit ate coconuts but this impossible because there is no way that there birds nectar beaks could break the outer covering of the shell.

A future research project could be on the behavioral aspect of the birds and since the three week program is during nesting/mating season you could find a nest and see how often it leaves to feed and how long it stay at the nest. This idea may sound boring but just observing 2 of the species the birds eats like the banana and the mango to see which one it prefers better the one it's named after or the mango.

References

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Evans, Peter. 1993. Birds of the Eastern Caribbean. Macmillan Press; New York.

Ostiguin Kim. 1999. *Observations of the host plants of Coereba flaveola (Bananaquit) on Springfield Plantation, Dominica W. I.*, Texas A&M University Study Abroad Student June 1999.

Foraging Habits of the Bananaquit over a Four Day Period

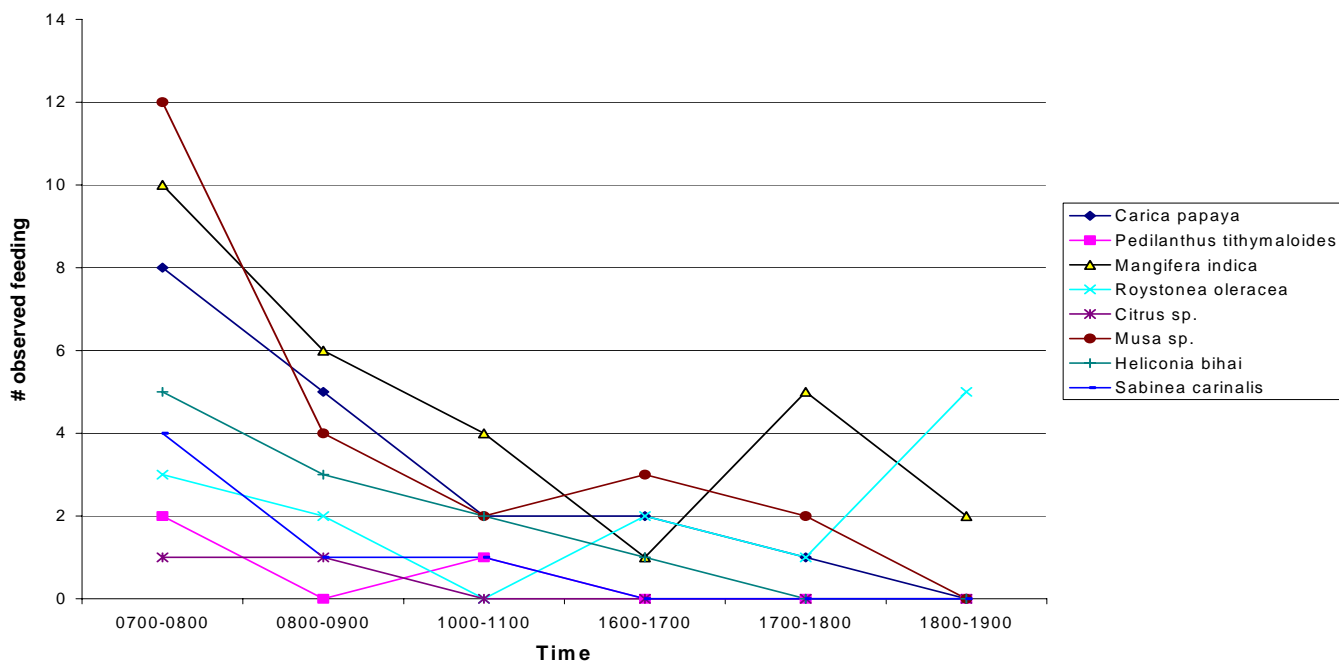


Fig. 1. Shows the comparison on the types of species the Bananaquit forages/feeds to the time of day that it occurs.

Table 1. The feeding behavior of the Bananaquit over a four-day period in one segments on the back porch of the stream house located on the Springfield Plantation.

Foraging/Feeding		Time of Day					
		0700	0800	0900	1600	1700	1800
Scientific Name	Common Name	# of Birds					
<i>Carica papaya</i>	Papaya	8	5	2	2	1	0
<i>Pedilanthus tithymaloides</i>	Slipper plants	2	0	1	0	0	0
<i>Mangifera indica</i>	Mango	10	6	4	1	5	2
<i>Roystonea oleracea</i>	Royal palm	3	2	0	2	1	5
<i>Citrus</i> sp.	Sweet orange	1	1	0	0	0	0
<i>Musa</i> sp.	Banana	12	4	2	3	2	0
<i>Heliconia bihai</i>	Heliconia	5	3	2	1	0	0
<i>Sabinea carinalis</i>	Bird of Paradise	4	1	1	0	0	0