

# Common Myna/s *Acridotheres tristis* extracting hair from captive Lowland Nyalas *Tragelaphus angasii*

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**Abstract.** This note describes observations of Common Myna/s *Acridotheres tristis* perching on captive Lowland Nyalas *Tragelaphus angasii* at Sydney Zoo, Bungarribee, New South Wales, and pulling tufts of hair. In two of 12 interactions, the Myna extracted hair, which we suspect was for replenishing nesting materials. The repetitiveness that we observed suggests that this behaviour is not uncommon in these birds.

The Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* is an introduced bird to the Australasian region (Burstal *et al.* 2020; Atsawaranunt *et al.* 2024). It is highly adaptive, well suited to suburban and city environments (Old *et al.* 2014; Menon & Mohanraj 2016), which has enabled the species to establish in more than 15 countries outside its native range in Central to South-east Asia (Peacock *et al.* 2007; Hart *et al.* 2020; Atsawaranunt *et al.* 2023). Its invasiveness is such that it is one of only three birds listed within the 100 worst invasive species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (Lowe *et al.* 2000). Its adaptability to new environments and resourcefulness extends to its reproductive biology, establishing nests in manmade structures (Pike *et al.* 2017) and exploiting non-natural nesting materials (Fitzsimons 2001; Umrani *et al.* 2022).

On 19 January 2024, we observed Common Myna/s repeatedly visiting Lowland Nyalas *Tragelaphus angasii* at Sydney Zoo, Bungarribee, New South Wales. On 12 separate instances, an individual perched on the back of an antelope (Figure 1) and intermittently pulled at tufts of hair on the antelope's dorsal crest. These interactions lasted between 30 seconds and 6 minutes, during which

there was no reaction from the Nyalas. In two interactions, a Myna was successful in extracting a tuft of hair and flew away immediately.

Perching on ungulates is not uncommon for Common Mynas (Cunningham 1948), as well as congeners (e.g. Tasirin & Fitzsimons 2014). There are reports of Common Mynas and congeners perching on ungulates to prey upon their ectoparasites (Cunningham 1948; Winnasis *et al.* 2011) or feed on insects that are disturbed and exposed by moving ungulates (Widyaningrum 2015; Brilliant *et al.* 2019). Our observations were distinguished in the extracting of hair from the Nyalas being directly observed. Although we did not observe any Common Myna nests, we surmise a most likely explanation for this behaviour was that hair was being collected to replenish nesting materials. In New South Wales, the Myna attends nests between around August and November (Morris *et al.* 1981; Perkins 2000), though brooding may extend to March in northern Australia (Lavery *et al.* 1968). Nesting materials are mostly twigs and leaves (Garrock *et al.* 2013; Shoma & Begum 2020; Umrani *et al.* 2022) but animal materials have included feathers (Arvind 2022; Rogers *et al.* 2023) and sloughed snake skins (Dhandhukia & Patel 2012; Sohi &



**Figure 1.** A Common Myna perched on the back of a Lowland Nyala. Photo: Matthew Mo

Kler 2017). To our knowledge, only three literature sources have mentioned the use of fur or hair for nest material by this species (Dement'ev & Gladkov 1954; Higgins *et al.* 2006; Rogers 2018).

Our observations of Common Mynas extracting hair from a captive exotic animal demonstrates the resourcefulness of the species, exploiting the establishment of a city zoo within its home-range. In addition, the repetitiveness we observed suggests that this behaviour is not uncommon in these birds. Across bird taxa, the exploitation of mammalian hair as nesting materials requires further study (Pollock *et al.* 2021) but is postulated to enhance nestling survival and recruitment through promoting insulation of nests (Hilton *et al.* 2004; Deeming *et al.* 2020).

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