

Speckled Mousebirds Nesting

As seen by Anne H. Outwater
in Mikocheni-B, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

A flock ranging in size from two to more than ten Speckled Mousebirds (Swahili: Pasa Michirizi) has been in my garden almost every day for at least two decades – maybe forever. We saw them almost every day, but we never located a nest.

Then on January 1st, 2011, a nest of Speckled Mousebirds was found by Raymond Millanzi while he was trimming the mchongoma hedge. This hedge was situated between two houses, each of which was 4-5 meters away.



The nest had been built in the center of a coppiced tree in which the recovering branches of the tree formed a frame for the nest. It was a “standard” cup nest, made with small twigs and strands of brown fibers (some of which were from coconut palm trees and grasses). Outside, the nest measured about 11 centimeters wide and 8 cm deep. The inner cup was about 9 cm wide and 5 cm deep. The nest seemed to be held together by dried brown grass fluff which was in the spaces between the strands of brown fibers.



Inside the nest, were three naked baby birds. The bodies were orange-pinkish; although their heads and wings, where there were bones, were darker especially around the eyes. Their upper mandibles were bright yellow-green like a little leaf that just fell from a tree.

Eggshells were still in the nest, so perhaps the smallest nestling was newly hatched, and the larger ones were two and three days old.

3 January 2011



The eyes of the bigger one were slightly open. The quill feathers of the older ones were coming through in the wings, and the tail feathers of the oldest were breaking out of the quills. The small one was alert and present. The three fit together quite neatly and there was plenty of room in the nest to grow into.

4 January 2011



The little one is gone.

5 January 2011



The biggest nestling has opened its eyes. The beaks and circles round their eyes were yellow-green and the legs were big and orange. When they opened their beaks, their tongues showed orange-yellow. Silvery-brown pin feathers were emerging needle-like - they emerged fastest at their wings, tails, and head crests in that order.

The nestlings were always seen touching each other, as if straining to be as close as possible. The birds covered their naked backs with their wing feathers. The larger one was often seen with its wing partially extended over its sibling, covering its naked back.

6 January 2011



They became less spikey as feathers emerged from the sheaths in bands of brown softness.

7 January 2011

The nestlings did not seem fearful when I appeared above them.



When they were about ten days old, they were alert to the camera, and appeared very confident: heads up, curious, crests relaxed, bright eyes glistening.

8 January 2011

When the oldest one was 11 days old, its reaction to my presence changed.



They ducked down. Perhaps a traumatic event engendered this alarm. Or, perhaps the Mousebirds' instinct to flee from intruders activates at this age.

9 January 2011

I erected the ladder and climbed up to the fifth step as usual. I carefully parted the branches as usual. The nestlings, now fledglings, became hyper-alert. Both moved quickly to face the back of the nest.



The biggest one climbed out of the nest.



His younger fellow who could not flee or did not yet have an instinct to leave the

nest, flattened on the bottom, grasping the fibers with its two big feet. The one who had left returned after about half an hour.



By evening, both fled the nest when I appeared. I decided to stop taking photos.

10 January 2011

My neighbor Stephen Magabe thought to slowly creep up to them to check that they were okay. He is taller than I, so did not have to make so many movements.



Photo by Stephen Magabe

This is the last sight we had of the fledglings.

The flock became seven. For a few days we could distinguish the young ones from the adults because their tails were shorter.

1 March 2011

A new Speckled Mousebird's nest, several meters closer to the house, was found by Raymond Millanzi while he was trimming the mchongoma hedge.

