

Purple-banded Sunbirds Nesting

as noted by Anne H. Outwater

In Mikocheni-B, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

Altitude: Sea level; GoogleEarth Coordinates (-6.76100111972169, 39.24798667430878)

5 October 2011

A few hours after I returned from a seven week trip, while resting on the upstairs veranda, a small group of young male Purple-banded and Collared Sunbirds came to the ivied grill and started twittering. They sang on and on, a high-pitched tune, and came back several times to continue, to the point that it seemed so purposeful, I felt compelled to figure out what they were trying to communicate.

Their flight led to a Sunbird's nest, hanging from a branch of mchongoma about five feet from the ground (very close to where Speckled Mousebirds had successfully raised two fledglings in June-July).



From almost all angles the nest was completely invisible. Even when visible, the nest was so beautifully camouflaged that from more than a few feet away it appeared as a blur in the vegetation.

6 October 2011

It was a strange work of art - a hanging pocket made from spider silk, chicken feathers, paint chips instead of lichen, leaves, shreds of bark, strands of coir, perhaps a caterpillar nest, with the frass, bits of green plastic and lined with what appeared to be kapok fibers.



7 October 2011

The nest was holding nestlings a few days old.



October 8, 2011

In the middle of the day, sometimes a head could be seen , dozing in the sun.



The gape around its mouth was very loose, and its facial feathers sparse. The nestling slowly opened its eyes. When it saw me, it quickly ducked into the nest.

9 October 2011

Two nestlings were sharing the nest.



10 October 2011

Sometimes they waited with only the tips of their beaks visible at the entrance.



12 October

An adult male Purple-banded Sunbird, presumably the father, was usually flitting about at a distance from the nest, catching the sun to flash his brilliant green, purple, and blue feathers like lights.



The quiet colored mother – brown, tans, no strong patterns - was the one surreptitiously flying in to feed the babies. The mother traveled back and forth, her beak filled with food for the nestlings.



while the father was distracting potential predators away from the nest.



13 October 2011

Early in the morning of the 13th, they allowed me to come very near without showing alarm.



When the mother flew to the nest, it was hardly more than seeing flitting shadows.

Even in the rain the mother was bringing food to the fledglings every few minutes. She would arrive at the nest with a beak full of food, staying no longer than a few seconds before flying away.



The fledglings were almost ready to leave the nest.



I returned in the afternoon to find...the nest had been completely ripped off. The loop over the branch that had held the nest - a tuft of spider silk, dead leaf, plant fibre, and wet feathers - was all that remained.



It had poured rain during the day. The branch had drooped over, heavy with rain, and a nest full of almost grown fledglings. Was it crows? - mongooses? Was it because I had brought attention to the nest while photographing it?

For many days the parents stayed in the distance.

However by November 9, 2011 Purple-banded Sunbirds had built another nest in almost the same place.



December 10, 2011

One month later,



At least one fledgling of the second brood successfully left the worn and tattered nest.