

NOTES

Dipteran fly parasitising the Seychelles stick insect *Carausius seychellensis* (Bolivar, 1895)

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During a two weeks expedition on the Seychelles central island Praslin in December 2004 (Pawlowski & Krämer 2005a, b) the habitat and feeding plant of the Seychelles stick insect, *Carausius seychellensis* (Bolivar, 1895) was investigated. *Carausius seychellensis* were mostly inactive during the day, being attached to plants. During the night, stick insects were active, feeding on ferns. Although, this fern plant was rather common on Praslin, the stick insect *Carausius seychellensis* was rather rarely distributed within these areas of fern plants. In total, only three adult females, two adult males and one juvenile were found sitting on the upper and the under side of these plants. One female with a damage on one of the six legs (which makes it distinguishable from the other specimen detected) was found twice within two days sitting at the same fern, displaying only little movement (probably during the night). Another female was attacked by two dipterans flies (Ceratopogonidae) parasitising on the joint of the leg of the stick insect and sucking haemolymph liquid (Fig. 1).

The two flies were about 1-3 mm in size and dark red to black in colour. The other stick insects observed did not show any ectoparasites. Even the locusts found on Praslin Island did not show any parasitic flies. Although it is well known that insects such as stick insects and locusts were hosts of various invertebrate endoparasites such as nematoda and nematomorpha (see Storch & Welsch 1991, 1994), parasitising flies on stick insects has not been detected so far. Even during later expeditions in November/December 2007 on the islands of Mahé and Praslin, only few stick insects of the various native species could be found across the two islands, excluding the area of the Morne



Fig. 1. Parasitising fly on the angle of the front leg of the Seychelles stick insect *Carausius seychellensis*.

Seychellois National Park (Mahé) where they are rather common. However, none of the stick insects displayed these parasitising flies at that time. Although a wasp attack on *Carausius seychellensis* has been described in the past (Hardling & Thompson 2002), this could not be seen as a parasitical behaviour rather than a predator behaviour. Thus, based on our observations, it is not very likely that these flies are real threats to the Seychelles stick insect *Carausius seychellensis* on the islands of Praslin or Mahe.

References

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Seafaring behaviour in House Crows *Corvus splendens* – a precursor to ship-assisted dispersal?

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Indian house crows *Corvus splendens* have colonised many parts of the world, largely through through travelling voluntarily on ships without human assistance. Meininger *et al.* (1984) and Ryall (1994, 1995, 2002) have charted their spread; Lever (2005) summarised the present distribution. Given their origin in the sub-continent, the Indian Ocean has been the main theatre of the spread; continental coastal ports have seen most invasions, but they have also reached the oceanic islands. Mauritius was first reached around 1900 (Carié 1904), the birds already ‘multiplying’ around the harbour in Port Louis by 1904 (Carié 1904, *contra* the usually stated date of 1910, e.g. Long 1981, Cheke 1987, Lever 2005, following Meinertzhagen 1912). After the original population was all but wiped out by a powerful cyclone in 1945, the island was recolonised in 1950 (Rountree *et al.* 1952, Cheke 1987). Birds were first seen in the Seychelles in 1970, with further arrivals in 1977 (Ryall 1994); the incipient colony was controlled but more birds have subsequently turned up (Skerrett *et al.* 2001, Ryall 2002). Crows appeared in Réunion in 2004 (Salamolard 2004, Cheke & Hume 2007, Chakouat *passim*); although one of a pair was shot, others are still present.

The house crow is the only landbird that regularly and deliberately hitches rides on ships, unusual behaviour that is potentially dangerous for the birds. These crows are persistent and abundant scavengers in all human habitations in their natural range, including ports, where exploring moored ships is simply an extension of their normal activities. Use of ships in harbour has been cited as an explanation for the birds’