

Helping beaks: An observation of interspecific allopreening between Indian Peafowl and Sri Lankan Junglefowl

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Abstract We report the first observation of interspecific allopreening behavior between a female Indian Peafowl and a male Sri Lankan Junglefowl, documented at Kumana National Park, Sri Lanka. This is the first record of this behavior in the wild from the South Asian region and it highlights the value of opportunistic wildlife records in understanding avian interspecies interactions.

Keywords: observations, grooming, symbiosis, preening, Indian Peafowl, *Pavo cristatus*, Sri Lankan Junglefowl, *Gallus lafayettii*

Összefoglalás Közleményünkben egy hím ceyloni tyúk és egy tojó kék páva közötti kölcsönös ápolási viselkedés (allopreening) megfigyeléséről számolunk be, ami a Sri Lanka területén található Kumana Nemzeti Parkban történt. Ez az első feljegyzés erről a viselkedésről vadon élő madaraknál a dél-ázsiai régióból, és rávilágít a vadon élő madarokról alkalmoszerűen készített fotók értékére.

Kulcsszavak: megfigyelések, kölcsönös ápolási viselkedés, szimbiózis, kék páva, *Pavo cristatus*, ceyloni tyúk, *Gallus lafayettii*

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Introduction

Allopreening, or mutual grooming, is a well-documented affiliative behavior in birds, commonly observed within social or mating pairs and is known to be an important behavior in terms of social bonding (Kenny *et al.* 2017), parental care (Gillies *et al.* 2021) and defense against ectoparasites (Villa *et al.* 2016). However, interspecific allopreening is exceedingly rare in the wild, and is often limited to captive conditions or highly social, mixed-species bird flocks (Verbeek *et al.* 1981). Here, we report an observation of interspecific allopreening behavior between a female Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*) and a male Sri Lankan Junglefowl (*Gallus lafayettii*), two ground-dwelling galliforms from Sri Lanka.

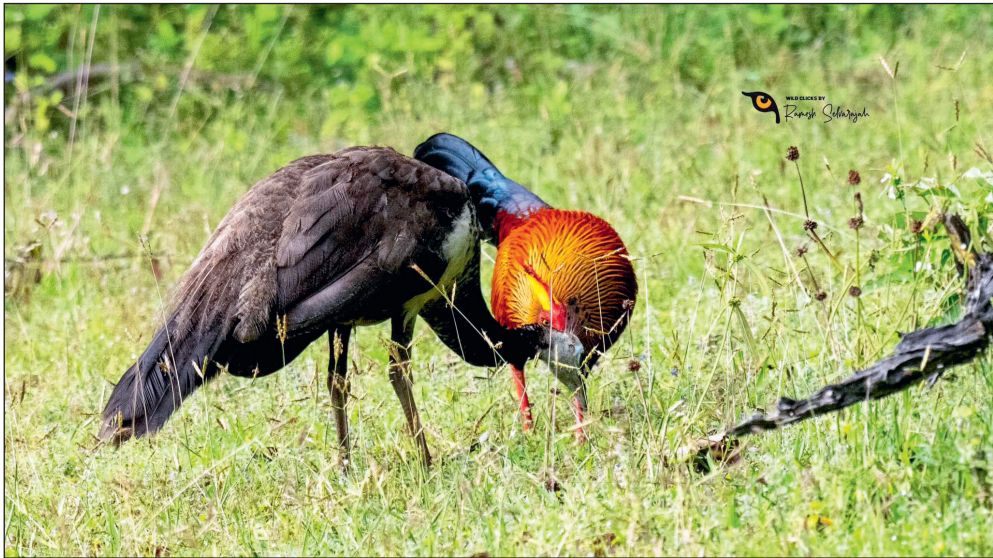


Figure 1. Female Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*) and male Sri Lankan Junglefowl (*Gallus lafayetii*) displaying allopreening behavior

1. ábra Kölcsönös ápolási viselkedést (allopreening) mutató tojó kék páva (*Pavo cristatus*) és hím ceyloni tyúk (*Gallus lafayetii*)

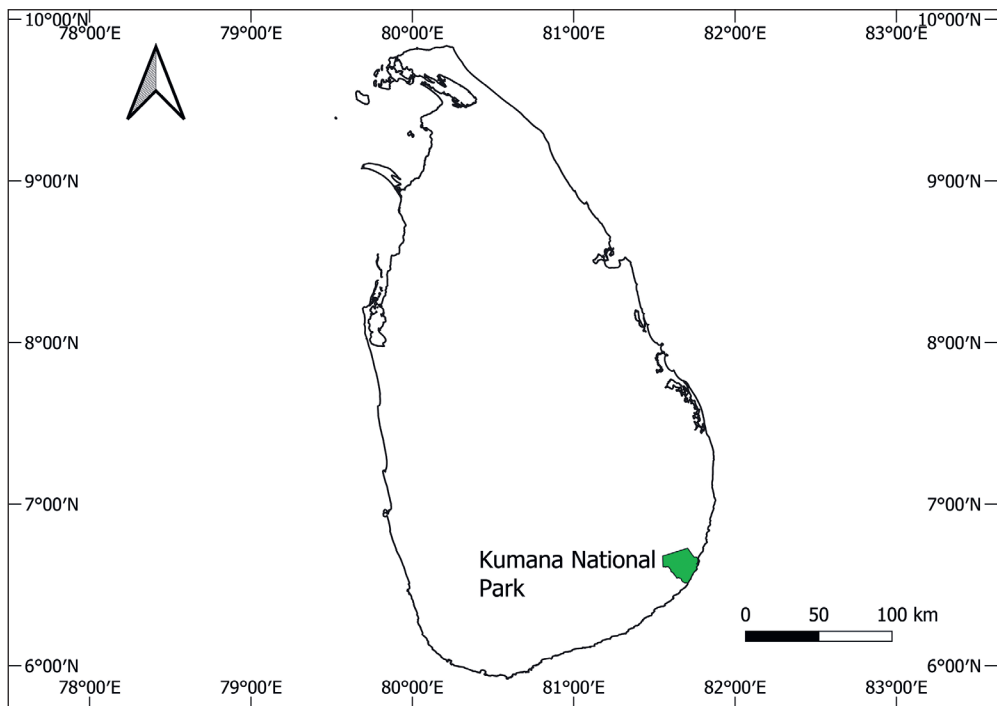


Figure 2. Location of the Kumana National Park in Sri Lanka (source: UNEP-WCMC and IUCN 2025)

2. ábra A Kumana Nemzeti Park elhelyezkedése Sri Lankán belül (forrás: UNEP-WCMC and IUCN 2025)

Observation

On 18 May 2025, a female Indian Peafowl and a male Sri Lankan Junglefowl was observed to be preening each other's bodies (*Figure 1*) in the Kumana National Park (6.517° N; 81.700° E) in Sri Lanka (*Figure 2*). This behavior was documented around 07:49 h in the morning, with both birds actively using their beaks to preen feathers around each other's head, neck and upper body. The birds were not displaying signs of aggression or distress, and the interaction occurred in a small open grassland area on the side of a forest trail. The interaction lasted approximately 10 minutes before both birds rushed into the adjacent dense forest possibly due to being disturbed by an incoming safari vehicle, and there were no other individuals of either species at the vicinity to be observed. The photographs were captured with a Nikon Z8 camera and a Nikon Z 180–600 mm lens.

Discussion

There are only a handful of records of interspecific allopreening in birds outside captivity from around the world. Several records are present on this behavior between Black Vultures (*Coragyps atratus*) and Crested Caracaras (*Caracara plancus*) from the South-American region (Ng & Jaspersen 1984, Palmeira 2008, Souto *et al.* 2009, Sanabria 2015). It has also been recorded from several species of cowbirds, a group of brood parasitic Icterids widespread across the American continents (Selander & La Rue Jr 1961, Verbeek *et al.* 1981, Post & Wiley 1992, Hunter 1994, Garrett & Molina 2005). Walsh *et al.* (2001) reported several observations of such interactions between a male Razorbill (*Alca torda*) and multiple female Common Murres (*Uria aalge*) from Newfoundland. Mo (2016) reported an observation from Australia between a Royal Spoonbill (*Platalea regia*) and an Australian White Ibis (*Threskiornis molucca*), two common waterbirds in the region. Cortés (2017) has reported another observation between a Monk Parakeet (*Myiopsitta monachus*) and Mitred Parakeet (*Psittacara mitratus*) from Barcelona. Most recently, Zhou and Zhang (2022) reported a case of interspecific allopreening between a Spot-necked Babbler (*Stachyris striolata*) and a Nonggang Babbler (*S. nonggangensis*) from Southern China.

To our knowledge this is the first record about this behavior from Sri Lanka or the South Asian region. Given the rarity of such interactions in the wild, this event raises intriguing questions about the social flexibility, affiliative behavior, and potential ecological or individual contexts that may facilitate such interactions. It also underscores the value of opportunistic natural history documentation in expanding our understanding of complex interspecific relationships among wildlife. Further field observations and behavioral studies are encouraged to explore the prevalence, triggers, and potential functions of such rare social behaviors.

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