

Proclaiming Evidence for Truth

THIS WEEK'S CREATION MOMENT

The Purple Thief



He hath made his wonderful works to be remembered: the LORD is gracious and full of compassion. (Psalm 111:4)

Birds and insects that take nectar from a flower without picking up any pollen are known as nectar robbers. Now, you'd probably think that nectar robbers would be harmful to plants and trees, but the desert teak tree couldn't survive without a nectar robber – the purple sunbird.

In order to reproduce, this tree needs birds to pollinate its flowers. But since a tree cannot reproduce with its own pollen, it needs birds to fly from flower to flower and from one tree to another. Anything that encourages the pollinating birds to fly farther away helps out the teak trees.

That's where the purple thief comes in. Researchers at the University of Delhi discovered that the sunbird visits the flowers one hour before the pollinating birds arrive. The purple sunbird has a long, sharp beak that pierces the base of the flower to feed, so it doesn't pick up any pollen. It does, however, empty the flower of about 60 percent of its nectar, leaving relatively little for the pollinators. This means that the pollinators will have to travel to more flowers and trees to get enough food, spreading pollen wherever they stop for a meal.

The researchers noted that "the robber plays a constructive and crucial role in the reproductive performance of [a] threatened tree species." How right they are! And this unusual but crucial dining arrangement shows once again what an ingenious God we serve!

Ref: "These trees don't mind getting robbed", Science News. Photo: Purple sunbird. Courtesy of J.M.Garg. (CC BY-SA 3.0 Unported)

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