Birds in the Backyard

We revisit the sunbirds again, but look at three species commonly found in southern India: the Purple Sunbird (*Cinnyris asiaticus*), covered in the March issue, the Purple-rumped Sunbird (*Leptocoma zeylonica*), and the Loten's Sunbird (*Cinnyris lotenia*). The male purple-rumped sunbird has a metallic green crown and shoulder patch, maroon back, purple rump, and yellow underparts. The female is olive-brown above, has a whitish throat and yellowish underside. The Loten's sunbird resembles the purple sunbird but has a long, curved beak. The male also has more brownish-black wings than those of the purple sunbird. The female is olive-brown above, with a white-tipped tail.

All three species feed on flower nectar and, occasionally, on insects and spiders. Therefore, one would expect competition between these species. Niche separation, by using different food species or feeding at different times, would reduce competition. There is an account of the Loten's sunbird and purple sunbird feeding differently at different flowers. However, not much is known, and interspecific competition and resource partitioning amongst these species are interesting topics for future study.

By T N C Vidya

Photo credits: (a) Kaustubh Verma (Purple sunbird male), (b) T N C Vidya (Purple-rumped sunbird male), (c) Shubha Bhat (Loten's sunbird male)

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