Birds in the Backyard

Barbets

We visit the barbets again, which are distributed across Asia, Africa, and the Neotropics. There are 34 species of Asian barbets and the Neotropical barbets include the toucans. Phylogenetic studies of barbets have been carried out to understand the evolutionary relationships between these species and why there is high species diversity. Three common barbets – the White-Cheeked Barbet (*Psilopogon viridis*), Brown-headed Barbet (*P. zeylanicus*), and Blue-throated Barbet (*P. asiaticus*) – are shown here. Different colours on the head probably serve as species-specific signals, with the first of these three species having white cheeks and eyebrows, a pale flesh-pink beak, and light brown head and breast streaked with white; the second with a yellow-orange patch around the eyes, brown head and throat, and a reddish pink beak; and the third with a crimson, yellow and black crown, and blue face and throat. Visual and acoustic (song) signals in Asian barbet species are influenced by body size and the environment (doi:10.1111/jeb.12084) Divergence in morphology (including body size) may lead to differing resource needs and allow multiple species to coexist in an area (doi: 10.1098/rsos.160117)

By: T. N. C. Vidya

Photo credits (L to R): Chaduranga Kanthraj Urs (Bengaluru), Angshuman Roy Choudhury (IISER Mohali), Suvendu Bhattacharjee (Kolkata)