

Feather Fascination!

with local Birdwatcher, Jim Butler

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INSECT-EATING BIRDS

About half of the world's 10,000 bird species feed on insects and because there are between six and ten million insect species the birds are offered a wide choice of prey! Consequently the insect-eating birds vary greatly in the way they hunt them.

The White-throated Treecreeper can be heard on most days of the year in our local forests. As its name suggests it hunts for insects on the bark of vertical tree trunks. It hunts systematically! It flies to the base of a tree and spirals its way up, probing the bark and feeding on the insects that it finds. When it gets near the top it flies quickly to the base of a nearby tree and starts the hunt again.

The Rainbow Bee-eater does not feed exclusively on bees, but also eats wasps and butterflies. It perches on high dead branches and darts out to catch flying insects on the wing. It takes its catch back to the perch where it rubs off the sting or venom glands before swallowing.

The Striated Pardalote feeds on sap-sucking insects that live under little shelters attached to the surfaces of leaves. This bird has evolved a beak shape that scrapes away the little shelter to expose the insect which it promptly devours. The Pardalote is more often heard than seen because it gives its three-note call at most times of the day often near houses.

The vulnerable Speckled Warbler feeds on the ground in the forest. It scratches in the leaf-litter to expose its insect prey. They often hunt in pairs and the male shares food with the female.

Knowing how particular birds hunt is part of the process of learning about birds and helps you to find and identify them in the forest.

Happy Birding!

~ Jim

Image: White-throated Treecreeper by Tom Tarrant ©