

SHORT COMMUNICATION

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DEFENSIVE BEHAVIOUR OF THE HOUSE SHREW, *SUNCUS MURINUS* (LINNAEUS) TOWARDS HOUSE CROW, *CORVUS SPLENDENS* VIEILLOT

The house crow, *Corvus splendens* Vieillot is a diurnal scavenging as well as a predatory bird. It is usually found that whenever live house mice and rats are released in open, attention of crows is drawn and they immediately attempt to pick them up to devour. The house shrew, *Suncus murinus* (Linnaeus), which is a nocturnal animal, leaves its abode, which is generally any hole in the ground near bushes, walls or pipes under trees and below stones, for foraging after nightfall. It has been recorded to be predated by the Barn Owl, *Tyto alba* (Scopoli) (Khajuria & Ghosal, 1970).

Practically no attempt has been made to study its interaction with a diurnal predatory bird like the house crow. The author had the opportunity of studying its behaviour towards the house crow.

A house shrew trapped in November, 1981 from Barisha, the south suburb of Calcutta, by using a wooden trap was released in the morning hours in a field to find its interaction with the house crow. The crow immediately came very close to the shrew and attempted to pick it up by holding its tail. The shrew at once turned towards the crow and opened its mouth emitting a deep whistling sound and jumped towards the crow to frighten it off. The crow withdrew a few steps back and then assisted by two other crows made another attempt but were not successful to either injure it or hold its

neck or tail due to the aggressive attitude of the shrew. The shrew was very agile and challenged the crow rushing to bite the birds. This continued for nearly 4-5 minutes until it was able to move towards a bush near about and hid itself under some weeds. The crows after a search of the area were unable to find their prey, gave up the attempt and moved out of the area. Thus, the house shrew escaped predation by the crows. To further study the interaction two shrews were released in the same situation the very next morning at about eight o'clock. The house crows were unable to kill either of them since one was observed to defend themselves by keeping back to back and fighting out the foes from whichever direction they attacked and moved to the shelter quickly only when they found a place to hide. The shrews in this case went under broken brick-chips. Pradhan (1980) observed that because of the extreme aggressive nature of the shrews irrespective of its size and smell they manage to keep all the rats (*Bandicota indica*, *Bandicota bengalensis*, *Rattus rattus*) at bay. The above observations confirmed that the house shrew is able to fend itself from diurnal predatory bird like the house crow by its sheer aggressive attitudes.

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