

Sunbathing Vermilion-crowned Flycatchers Repulse Mates

LAWRENCE KILHAM

Department of Microbiology, Dartmouth Medical School, Hanover, New Hampshire 03755 USA

Vermilion-crowned Flycatchers (*Myiozetetes similis*, formerly called Social Flycatchers) remain paired the year around (Skutch 1960). I was watching the members of a pair foraging in close association along the bank of a pond (near Escuintla in the Pacific lowlands of Guatemala) on 29 December 1976, when the two came to a patch of relatively bare earth 1–2 m in extent. This was late in the morning of a hot, sunny day. One of them immediately sprawled belly to the earth, with wings and tail widely spread and head back in the sunbathing posture of a passerine (Hauser 1957). When the second flycatcher tried to do likewise, it was driven away. After about a minute, the first bird left and the second one took its place. It too was intolerant, repulsing an attempt of the first flycatcher to sunbathe again. These sequences of alternate sunbathing with attacks on the nonsunbathing partner were repeated five times. I saw no signs of anting, and neither bird preened or scratched in association with the sunbathing.

Could the territorial behavior have had survival value? Sunbathing, with birds sprawled in what appear to be relatively helpless positions, would seem dangerous in terms of predation. As Simmons (1964) noted, sunbathing birds are often "very incautious and easily approached." It might be advantageous, therefore, if one of a pair of Vermilion-crowned Flycatchers were on guard while its partner sunbathed, the exclusiveness insuring that only one partner at a time would be in the awkward position. While such a behavior might not evolve in birds traveling in flocks or in monogamous birds with temporary pair bonds, it might do so among Vermilion-crowned Flycatchers, which have permanent pair bonds and forage as pairs.

A question is why should Vermilion-crowned Flycatchers, which live in the open and are in the sun much of the time anyway, sunbathe in the heat of midday in a tropical lowland? There was no indication that any of the usual reasons given for sunbathing, as summarized by Hauser (1957) and Simmons (1964), among others, applied. According to Stiles (pers. comm.), the birds should have been in fresh plumage, having finished their annual molt several months previously. Houston (1980) has recently theorized that sunning in vultures serves to warm feather proteins, enabling feathers distorted by pressures involved in soaring to resume normal shapes. Could this principle apply to other birds as well, if other kinds of flying can also pressure contour feathers? The extra heat to be found against bare earth on a hot day would then be useful as a form of feather maintenance. Lanyon (1958) found that heat rather than light was the incentive to sunbathing in captive meadowlarks. An added point is that a standard way of straightening distorted feathers, when preparing specimens, is to hold them in a jet of steam.

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Ingestion of Plastics by Laysan Albatross

TED N. PETTIT, GILBERT S. GRANT, AND G. CAUSEY WHITTOW

*Department of Physiology, John A. Burns School of Medicine, University of Hawaii,
 Honolulu, Hawaii 96822 USA*

Ingestion of plastic particles by seabirds has been reported for the Laysan Albatross (*Diomedea immutabilis*) by Kenyon and Kridler (1969), Fork-tailed Storm-Petrels (*Oceanodroma furcata*), Horned Puffins (*Fratercula corniculata*), and Parakeet Auklets (*Cyclorhynchus psittacula*) from the Aleutians (Ohlendorf et al. 1978), adult and nestling Leach's Storm-Petrels (*Oceanodroma leucorhoa*) from New-