
Stay and help or go (to help)? - Cooperative breeding in white-crested helmetshrikes

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Why would an individual forego or delay its own reproduction and instead help raising the offspring of others? Numerous studies have already established concepts and models addressing these questions. Yet the reasons for and forms of cooperative breeding can greatly vary between species, and various theoretical concepts on group and individual benefits lack practical evidence from the field. We will thus investigate social organisation and dispersal in white-crested helmetshrikes *Prionops plumatus*. This bird species has rarely been studied, yet observations like same-sex offspring dispersing and founding a new group together prove it to be a fascinating system to unravel direct and indirect benefits of cooperative breeding tactics. We thus plan to 1) investigate the cooperative breeding system and dispersal patterns in white-crested helmetshrikes with modern techniques, 2) test group augmentation theories and cost-benefit trade-offs for staying versus dispersing in a new study system and 3) investigate the effect of gradual and abrupt environmental changes on group stability, home ranges, dispersal and reproductive success. We collect data in the Mbuluzi Game Reserve in eSwatini where approximately 30 wild groups of white-crested helmetshrikes live, using a combination of genetic and observational approaches. Our findings will contribute to the understanding of cooperative breeding in non-human animals.