

Western Rock Nuthatches *Sitta neumayer* feeding their nestlings bread, Armenia

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Western Rock Nuthatches *Sitta neumayer* feed on invertebrates, plant seeds and fruit (Adamian & Klem 1997, Cramp & Perrins 1993, Dementyev 1954). The invertebrate diet consists principally of beetles (Coleoptera) as well as butterfly (Lepidoptera) larvae. The stomach contents of 14 birds studied revealed 44 items (Adamian & Klem 1999): 20 beetles (45.5% by number), 13 larvae, nymphs, flies (Muscidae), ants (Formicidae) and moth larvae (29.5%), as well as 11 pieces of grass and Lime tree *Tilia* seeds (25.0%).

Western Rock Nuthatch nestlings in east Georgia are fed mainly on geometer moths (Geometridae) and butterflies, especially the Small White *Pieris rapae* (Chinchiladze 1960). Studies of stomach contents and neck-ring samples of nestlings in Armenia revealed 55 items: 43 caterpillars (81%), the rest consisting of snails (Pulmonata), beetles and ants (Adamian 1965). Kull in Löhrl (1967) reported rock nuthatches, *Sitta neumayer* or *S. tephronota*, in September in Persia that pecked at bread crumbs or melon seeds, in any event remains of human meals.

On 3, 4 and 6 June 2009, for several hours daily, I observed an occupied Western Rock Nuthatch breeding cavity in the Noravank gorge (39.70° N, 45.21° E), Armenia. The breeding cavity was c10 m above the ground in a cliff face, directly opposite a restaurant (the information centre of the Noravank IBA).

Both adult birds fed their nestlings on several occasions with pieces of Armenian unleavened bread 'lavasch', which they collected from the ground and restaurant tables. Large pieces of bread, up to 10 cm in length, were also flown to the nest cavity in the cliff face, broken up with pecks of their beaks, and then fed to the almost fledged nestlings in the nest entrance.

On 4 June, both adult birds were observed flying and climbing repeatedly, heads upwards, from the bottom to the top of the cliff face foraging for food (insects). These adults were never observed foraging head downwards like the Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*. I have observed the latter species foraging head downwards in Armenia. Löhrl (1967) commented that the Western Rock Nuthatch is a clumsier climber than the Eurasian Nuthatch and can hardly climb head-first downwards.

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