

Are arecanut plantations really suitable for biodiversity conservation?

Ranganathan et al. (1) conclude that arecanut plantations in south India are useful for bird conservation based on a comparison of species richness with intact forest. Consideration of abundance data might provide different insights. The supporting information (SI) shows that typical forest species such as *Irena puella*, *Hypothymis azurea*, and *Alcippe poiocephala* were present in both forests and arecanut plantations but were detected 6, 3, and 8 times, respectively, more often in forests. In my experience in the Western Ghats, I find that most forest bird species, including Great Hornbill, are occasionally found even in bird-unfriendly land uses such as tea plantations, possibly during movement between forest patches; but they are detected much more often in intact forests. Information on population densities and breeding success of species are required before we can decide on the suitability of a particular land use for conservation.

My second point of contention with the paper is the authors' assertion that these plantations are bird-friendly because they are traditionally managed. To know if the type of management matters, a comparison needs to be made with arecanut plantations that are managed differently, something which is lacking in this study.

Finally, I take exception to the authors describing arecanut as "a mild, coffee-like stimulant" (1). There is scientific evidence to suggest that chewing betel nut can lead to oral fibrosis, malignancy, and other diseases (2).

Arecanut plantations might, in fact, be a win-win solution for farmers and biodiversity conservation, but we cannot tell for certain until we gather more evidence.

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