

## SOME FACTS ON FAECAL SACS

A faecal sac is a mucous membrane, generally white or clear with a dark end, that surrounds the faeces of some species of nestling birds. It allows parent birds to easily remove faecal material from the nest. The nestling usually produces a faecal sac within seconds of being fed; if not, a waiting adult may prod around the youngster's cloaca to stimulate excretion. Young of some species adopt specific postures to signal that they are producing faecal sacs. For example, nestling Fairy Wrens raise their posteriors in the air. Other species deposit the sacs on the rim of the nest, to be removed the parents.

Faecal sac generation is most prevalent in passerines and their near relatives, which have young that remain in the nest for longer periods. In some species, the faecal sacs of small nestlings are eaten by their parents. In other species, and when nestlings are older, the sacs are usually taken some distance from the nest for disposal. Faecal sac production is usually ceases shortly before fledging.

Sighting of an adult bird carrying a faecal sac is used in bird censuses as an indication of breeding.

Removal of faecal material improves nest sanitation, which increase the likelihood that nestlings will remain healthy. It also helps to reduce the chance that predators will see or smell faecal accumulation and thereby find the nest. There is evidence that adult birds of some species gain a nutritional benefit from eating the faecal sacs; studies have shown that females, which tend to be more nutritionally stressed than males, more often consume sacs than males.

Avian polyomavirus has been recorded as being passed from offspring to parent through the removal of faecal sacs, particularly if the sacs are swallowed. As previously stated, females of many species remove a greater percentage of faecal sacs than males. Therefore, females are particularly susceptible to this method of disease transmission.

Faecal sac examination can be used to learn a number of things about individual birds. The sac contents can reveal details of a nestling's diet, and can show what contaminants the young bird has been exposed to.

R.V.C. with help from Wikipedia