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Buff-throated Saltator eats army ants.—The relationship between army ants and birds in Neotropical forests has been studied carefully by Willis and others (see Willis and Oniki 1978, and included references). The birds that attend the ant swarms forage upon the invertebrates and small vertebrates that flee the ants (Willis and Oniki 1978), and several bird species obtain virtually all of their food from this source. Although a number of species of birds occasionally eat adult ants, and some woodpeckers are specialists on ants (Bequaert 1922, Schubart et al. 1965, Short 1982, Willard et al. 1991), the attendant species at army ant swarms do not ordinarily eat the army ants themselves (Willis and Oniki 1978), despite some initial confusion about this issue (see Bequaert 1922). The few army ants recovered from the stomachs of attendant species (Willis and Oniki 1978, Sick 1984, pers. obs.) were probably due to accidental ingestion of ants that were on prey items. The only certain report of a bird intentionally eating army ants is by Lancaster (1966), who noted that an incubating Slaty-breasted Tinamou (*Crypturellus boucardi*) ate some when a swarm passed over the nest. However, there are no published records of attendant species deliberately eating army ants. Here I report the first confirmed exception to this pattern, a record of a Buff-throated Saltator (*Saltator maximus*) feeding on army ants (*Eciton burchelli*) in the Reserva Florestal Rio Doce, about 30 km north of Linhares, Espírito Santo, in eastern Brazil.

I observed a small swarm of army ants along the edge of disturbed forest near a marsh on 8 August 1988 at about 12:25. The swarm had attracted only a few birds: Squirrel Cuckoo (*Piaya cayana*), Planalto Woodcreeper (*Dendrocolaptes platyrostris*), White-shouldered Fire-eye (*Pyriglena leucoptera*) and Cocoa Thrush (*Turdus fumigatus*). After watching the activity for about 5 min, I became aware of repeated bill-snapping coming from a vine tangle about 4 m up in a small tree. Because the insects that army ant attendants eat are fleeing from the

moving columns of ants, actively foraging birds at ant swarms usually move about and do not remain foraging at a single site for long, so I investigated.

I found that a column of *E. burchelli* was moving up the tree trunk, and that a Buff-throated Saltator was picking off ants one by one as the ants ran by. In five min of observation, before the bird flew away, it made over sixty gleanings from the trunk. Of those, at least half resulted in the capture of an ant. On at least two occasions, the ant captured was one of the large soldiers, but most ants were workers. The saltator was unquestionably eating the ants, not using them for some other purpose. The other ants in the column showed no apparent response to the removal of a small number of their colleagues.

After the saltator left, I examined the ant column carefully. All the ants were *E. burchelli*, and none was seen carrying anything. It seems extremely unlikely that the saltator was obtaining anything other than adult army ants in its foraging efforts.

The Buff-throated Saltator is rare at army ant swarms. Despite thousands of hours observing birds at ant swarms, Willis (1986) reports only 30 records of this common and widespread species at swarms. On several occasions, he observed saltators pecking at insects on trunks, and on one occasion he believed that it was possible that army ants were the target, when they engaged in behavior similar to that reported here. This raises the possibility that Buff-throated Saltators infrequently, but regularly, eat army ants.

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