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## **A behavioural note on the Velvet-fronted Nuthatch from Nameri National Park, Sonitpur, Assam**

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In the late afternoon of March 23, 2022, I observed a pair of Velvet-fronted Nuthatches near the Pygmy Hog Conservation Centre, situated within the forest range office campus in Potasali, Sonitpur, Assam. Initially, the two birds were observed climbing up and down a tree, but they gradually transitioned to hopping on the ground and eventually entered the forest department's garage. One of the birds was observed collecting plant fibres and flying away, while the other engaged in a search for caterpillars. During their ground-hopping behaviour, both the birds maintained their claw tips in contact with the ground and their phalanges curved inward. Remarkably, these observations recurred at around the same time for two consecutive days.



**Image 1: A female Velvet-fronted Nuthatch foraging on the ground**

Nuthatches, belonging to the Sittidae family, are unique in their behaviour of storing nuts and other food items within tree crevices, which they cover with lichen, moss, or bark. These arboreal passerines inhabit various types of forests and possess the ability to hop up and down tree trunks unaided by their tails, distinguishing them from treecreepers and woodpeckers. Notably, the Rock Nuthatch exhibits an exception to this behaviour, as it descends downhill and primarily hops instead of climbing upward (Löhrl, 1988).

Contrary to the previous findings, Grimmet *et al.* (2016) reported that Velvet-fronted Nuthatches typically do not forage on the ground. Additionally, they noted that while certain sympatric species, such as the Chestnut-vented and Indian Nuthatches, occasionally engage in ground foraging, others like the Chestnut-bellied Nuthatches do so more frequently (Ali *et al.*, 1987; Matthysen, 2010). Furthermore, nuthatch species dependent on coniferous forests have been observed descending to the ground to collect fallen cones (Smith and Balda, 1979).

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