

Story: Decisions, Decisions

November 23, 2025

Jeremiah 23:1-6

Luke 23:33-43

The common waxbills may be the smallest birds in Hawai'i – meaning how big the adults get. Newly hatched chicks even of very large birds can be smaller. But if you see a very small bird with a rosy beak, it's likely to be a common waxbill.

They like to eat the small seeds of grasses and herbs, and they tend to move about in flocks of anywhere from a pair up to thirty or forty birds. With a flock, of course, comes the problem of decision. If I'm the only one who needs to make a choice, well, I can make the choice. I decide whether to go this way or that way. When there's somebody else, though, now we have to work out our direction, our left or right, our up or down.

Waxbills have the same problem. When they've eaten the seeds in this plot of grass, how do they decide where to go next?

A waxbill decided one day, after a certain amount of chirped argument, that somebody had to take charge. Somebody had to make the decision. Somebody had to rule.

"We're going this way," he called, and took off. Most of the other waxbills took off with him, but not all, so he circled back and screeched at them until they, too, joined the rest of the flock and flew with him. Some of them were relieved not to have to argue any more. Others were irritated that they had ideas that nobody listened to. And there were a few that didn't want to go in this direction at all.

One of the nice things about being a bird that eats grass seed is that, pretty much any direction you go is likely to have grass in it. They flew. They found. They ate. But not everybody in the flock was happy.

The next day, the waxbill in charge decided to take charge again, but this time some of the waxbills wouldn't go at all. He chirped at them. He screeched at them. He even flew at them as if he was going to hit them with his wings. But they wouldn't go.

Eventually the flock settled back to the ground again, and one of them said, "I don't mind following you, but we need to take trouble to agree which way we're going to go."

"No, we don't," said their self-appointed leader. "I know what I'm doing. I'm in charge."

“We all have ideas about where to find seeds,” said the waxbill speaking for the others. “Some might be more right. Some might be more wrong. And that includes you. If we all share, we’ve got a better chance that the ones who are more right will be heard, and that we, as a group, will find more seeds.”

“You’re a fine leader,” he went on, “but you’re not the only one with good ideas. We’ll follow – but we’ll also contribute. If you don’t want to listen, well, somebody else will have to lead.”

It took longer that way. It did. But this little flock of little birds did better than they ever had before at finding good clumps of grasses in seed, and they did it with birds who felt better about their leadership and their fellow fliers in the flock than they ever had before.

It can be a challenge to make decisions. It might be that the most important decision you can make is how you make a decision for yourself and with others.

by Eric Anderson