

FUSCOUS HONEYEATER NEAR LAURA

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On the morning of January 28, 1974, in company with Max McGarvie of King Island, I visited Wirrabara Forestry Reserve, 8 km south-west of Wirrabara (in the Lower North). We concentrated our observations in an area of eucalypt with thick undergrowth, mainly of acacia, with patches of small eucalypt. During the two hours spent in the area, calls such as "arig-arig-a-taw-taw" resembling those of the Fuscous Honeyeater were heard on several occasions. Max mentioned that it seemed too far west for this species, but all efforts to sight the birds failed. Being comparatively new to this area I did not realise at the time that the occurrence of the Fuscous Honeyeater there would be unusual.

On the afternoon of November 3, 1974, I paid a lone visit to an area beside the Beetaloo Reservoir road, 7 km west of Laura, and 14 km south of the Wirrabara Forestry area. While

"squeaking up" a party of Purple-backed Wrens, *Malarus lamberti*, a honeyeater came within two metres, and after spending several minutes in the nearby bush, flew to a flowering eucalypt *Eucalyptus leucoxylon*, ten metres away where other honeyeaters were feeding. During the next 30 minutes, four species of honeyeaters, Spiny-checked *Acanthagenys rufogularis*; White-plumed *Meliphaga penicillata*; Brown-headed *Melithreptus brevirostris*; and the first honeyeater sighted, the Fuscous *Meliphaga fusca*, fed on the blossoms. 15 Honeyeaters were identified as Fuscous as they passed through the flowering eucalypt from the west, and after feeding moved east down a gully with low growth. Observations were made in overcast conditions at 15.00 hours with 8 x 30 binoculars.

I have observed the Fuscous Honeyeater in the eastern States, as has Max McGarvie, but

owing to Max's remarks on his visit, the following description was noted when I returned to the car—

A grey-brown bird with lighter grey abdomen, washed on wings and tail with olive. Dark eye ring, black bill. The barely distinguishable plumes behind the eyes appeared to be dusky off-white. In size it appeared slightly shorter and stockier than the White-plumed and was duller in colour. A very active feeder, moving from lower bushes into the taller eucalypt and then flying to lower bushes in the gully.

I failed to find the species on visits to the areas in January, 1975, and with Gordon Ragless in March and June, 1975. This would suggest that these birds were a party passing through the area.

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EDITORIAL NOTE

The Fuscous Honeyeater, noted for its nomadic habits, is apparently a scarce visitor to South Australia from the East, having been previously recorded in six widely-scattered localities in all parts of the year. The records known to the writer are given here for convenience:

- (1) Annadale (Truro-Blanchetown road, Western Murray Mallee), a specimen taken on May 30, 1911, by J. B. Cleland. (*S. Aust. Orn.* 8:5).
- (2) Bool Lagoon (South-East). Several flocks each of c. 30 noted, and a specimen secured, by J. B. Hood on Aug. 22, 1937. Also recorded here by Hood in 1933 and 1939 (*S.A.O.* 15:47-8).
- (3) St. Marys Peak, Flinders Ranges. Six, presumed to be this species, seen clearly by H. E. A. Jarman on April 8-9, 1939 (*S.A.O.* 24:66, 106).
- (4) Nr. Sutherlands (also Western Murray Mallee). Three seen by E. F. Boehm after many searches, and a specimen taken, on Feb. 2, 1942 (*S.A.O.* 19:18).
- (5) Berri (Upper Murray). Recorded three or four times by D. M. Cornish in 1964, and also by K. J. Mack in Jan. 1965 (*S.A.O.* 24:66, 106).
- (6) Manunda Stn. (Lower North). One recorded by Garnham Skipper on Jan. 20, 1968 (*S.A.O.* 25:139).

EDITOR.