

THE BROWN HONEYEATER IN NORTHERN TERRITORY

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The Brown Honeyeater *Lichmera indistincta* is widespread in northern, eastern and western Australia (Slater 1975) but has only been recorded from the extreme north of South Australia, Stevenson Creek (North 1896 quoted in Condon 1968). I record here a few notes on the behaviour and appearance of this species from the Alice Springs area.

Brown Honeyeaters appear to be quite common in the Macdonnell Ranges in areas of open woodland (*Eucalyptus terminalis*, *Acacia* spp. and *Hakea* spp.) on rocky hillsides. Several

birds were seen near Simpson's Gap (15 km W of Alice Springs) on 24 and 28 September 1975, they were common at Ormiston Gorge on 27 September, and in Palm Valley on 30 September. In the last place they were on the rocky hillsides rather than in the palms. I also saw a few birds 3 km W of Alice Springs and 18 km E of Alice Springs, again in open woodland on rocky hillsides.

In appearance the Brown Honeyeater looked strikingly like the Crescent Honeyeater *Phylidonyris pyrrhoptera*. The overall dull brown

plumage, with some yellow on the primaries, small size and fairly long slightly decurved beak gave the appearance of a female Crescent Honeyeater lacking the dark crescent mark on the side of the breast. The resemblance was increased by the bird's behaviour: it fed rapidly for a short period and then sat very still for a while chirruping loudly from the inner branches of a tree in just the same way as Crescent Honeyeaters do in the Mount Lofty Ranges near Adelaide. Jarmann (1944) also commented that a bird he presumed to be a Brown Honeyeater was much like a female Crescent Honeyeater, although Francis (1942) in Western Australia suggested that it was rather like a Spinebill *Acanthorhynchus*.

A range of flowers was available in the Macdonnell Ranges during my visit and Brown Honeyeaters were seen feeding on the flowers of mistletoes *Lysiana exocarpi* and *Amyema quandang*. They were also seen taking sap oozing in droplets from the green unripe fruits of Corkwood *Hakea divaricata*. This sap tasted sweet and would be an easily available substitute for nectar.

The Grey-headed Honeyeater *Lichenostomus keartlandi* is also quite common in the

Macdonnell Ranges, especially in mallee *E. oleosa-Triodia* in rocky areas, but also among *Acacia*, *E. terminalis*, *Hakea* woodland. It seemed very similar to its southern relatives in the same genus and is probably their ecological equivalent in its appropriate habitat. Although chiefly insectivorous it was seen taking nectar from *Amyema quandang*, *E. oleosa*, *Eremophila duttonii* and *Hakea divaricata*. It also takes sap from unripe *Hakea* fruits.

The Corkwood *Hakea divaricata* was flowering very prolifically to the east of Alice Springs in late September 1975; and in one area Grey-headed, White-plumed *L. penicillatus* and Singing Honeyeaters *L. virescens*, at least one male Crimson Chat *Ephthianura tricolor* and a White-winged Triller *Lalage sueurii* were feeding on the nectar. Elsewhere I saw Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters *Acanthagenys rufogularis* visiting *Hakea* flowers.

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