

YELLOW-PLUMED AND TAWNY-CROWNED HONEYEATERS IN RIVER RED GUMS

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On 9 December 1977, F. H. Sheldon and I investigated an extensive belt of flowering River Red Gums *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* 40 km west of Lock on Eyre Peninsula. The gum woodland overtopping a low swathe of dead grass occurred on skeletal soils and a limestone pavement, and was separated from other native vegetation by grassland pasture. Three species of honeyeaters were recorded in approximately 30 minutes—Yellow-plumed *Lichenostomus ornatus*, Tawny-crowned *Phylidonyris melanops* and Red Wattlebird *Anthochaera carunculata*. Yellow-plumeds were numerous amongst the canopies and at least one juvenile was seen. Tawny-crowneds were flushed three or four times on the ground and flew up into the lower parts of the gums. An adult and several juveniles were seen in a small area. Red Wattlebirds were foraging amongst the canopies and blossoms. It was the only species noted in similar habitats up to 33 km further west.

In South Australia, Ford and Paton (1976) regard the Yellow-plumed Honeyeater as almost exclusively a mallee inhabitant, though their data indicate that it occasionally occurs in mallee-heath or non-eucalypt habitats. Its occurrence in River Red Gum woodland is most unusual, but perhaps explicable in terms of the absence of the White-plumed Honeyeater

L. penicillatus, the common honeyeater of the genus in River Red Gum habitats outside Eyre Peninsula. The White-plumed and Yellow-plumed are similar in feeding ecology but mostly occur in distinct habitats (Ford and Paton, 1976). Thus the Yellow-plumed is apparently able to exploit the resources of River Red Gum habitat in the absence of the White-plumed, at least when the trees are flowering. Neither species was recorded in stands of flowering River Red Gum fringing claypans 33 km to the west, nor in flowering River Red Gum savannah and pasture eight kilometres west.

The only reports of the White-plumed Honeyeater on Eyre Peninsula are Weidenbach's (1924) frequent sightings in the Cleve hills, Mack's (1969) observations of breeding birds in River Red Gums in Bascombe Well Conservation Park, and Jenkin and Waterman's (1965) record at Coffin Bay. The species' River Red Gum habitat is patchily distributed on Eyre Peninsula, occurring in small isolated communities from southern Eyre Peninsula north-west to the Mount Wedge district (Smith, 1963; Peter Copley, pers. comm.). The White-plumed's status on the peninsula must be regarded as uncertain. If present, it cannot be widespread judging from our investigations and the lack of records.

The Tawny-crowned Honeyeater is primarily an inhabitant of the 'sclerophyll' land systems (as defined by Specht, 1972) in South Australia. It is most abundant on the closed and open heaths of the Ninety-Mile Plain (Hatch, 1977; Reid and Close, in prep.) and Kangaroo Island (Hugh Ford, pers. comm.) where it can be very numerous, and heathland would appear to be its preferred habitat both in South Australia (Ford and Paton, 1977) and New South Wales (Recher, 1971). The species is also known from woodland-heath or mallee-heath associations in the lower South-East (pers. obs.), Mount Rescue Conservation Park (Reid and Close, in prep.), and the northern Mount Lofty Ranges (Ford and Paton, 1977). Its occurrence in River Red Gum woodland and pasture on Eyre Peninsula seems unusual. No birds were seen feeding at eucalypt blossoms, and the activities of the birds on the ground were not

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observed. Tawny-crowns were not seen further west in similar habitat.

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