

Order Passeriformes, Family Meliphagidae,
Genus Myzantha.

Myzantha melanocephala whitei—The Noisy Minah.

· Description—Upper Surface.—Forehead and lores, dull white; crown of head, black; ear coverts, dark grey; hind neck and sides of the neck, brown, finely barred with white, the lines becoming fainter and wider apart towards the shoulders; back, brown, each feather having a darker subterminal spot, giving the back a mottled appearance; lower back, faintly tinged with green; upper tail coverts, light brown.

Under Surface—Throat, dull white, with a streak of dull black down the centre; breast, grey, each feather having a subterminal band of brown, giving the breast a scaly appearance; abdomen and under tail coverts, dull white.

Wing—Primaries, dull black, distal portions of the outer webs and tips white, the proximal portions of the outer webs of the last three faintly tinged with green, basal portions of the inner webs broadly margined with white; secondaries, dull black, the outer webs broadly margined with yellowish green.

Tail—Two central feathers dark grey, tipped with light brown; the rest of the tail feathers dull black, largely tipped with dull white.

Legs and Feet—yellow.

Bill—Yellow.

Iris—Light brown, bare skin below and behind the eye, yellow.

Measurements—Total length of skin, 255 m.m.; wing, 145 m.m.; tail, 130 m.m.; bill, 18 m.m.; tarsus, 32 m.m.

The female resembles the male in colour, but is slightly smaller in all measurements. The young from the nest resemble their parents.

Distribution—This bird is found in all the Eastern States, but does not extend west of St. Vincent's Gulf, nor is it found in Kangaroo Island. Until about 25 years ago it was unknown in the Adelaide district, but since that time it has gradually extended along the foot hills from the Barossa Ranges until it is now fairly common, and is still extending its range over the plains, for it is only during the last three years that they have appeared at the Reedbeds, where they are now fairly numerous. They appear to have reached South Australia from the Murray, along the banks of which they are common, though they do not extend into the mallee country on either side of the stream.

Habits—They inhabit open forest lands fairly well, but not too thickly timbered. The high stringy bark hill country with thick undergrowth is not favoured by them. In the breeding season they are found in pairs, but when nesting has finished they go about in small flocks of five to ten in number. They are exceedingly noisy and animated birds, being always on the move uttering a great variety of notes and calls. They are very inquisitive and will peer down from the tree tops at anything strange, calling loudly to the rest of the flock who usually gather to join in the clamour. They are good mimics, and will at times give imitations of the calls of other birds.

Flight—Rather slow, straight and flapping, not undulating.

Song—A great variety of notes. When feeding they utter a clear bell-like note. Sometimes the whole flock will gather in the top of a tree and utter loud squawking notes, and at other times a shrill clear whistle. This last is the alarm note, and is uttered on the approach of a hawk or other enemy. They are occasionally a great nuisance to sportsmen, frightening up any game they may be stalking. On the other

hand the aborigines used to, and some sportsmen on the Murray still, make use of an imitation of this alarm call to bring high flying ducks to the water and within range.

Food—Largely consists of insects taken on the ground or captured in the air. The bird may sometimes be seen, especially in the evening, flying out from a tree and catching some fly or other insect, and returning to its perch to eat it. In the Eastern States they have a bad name as fruit eaters, but in South Australia have not done much harm in that respect up till yet, though the gardeners at the foothills say they are beginning to get a taste for soft fruits. They are known to feed on the berries of the African box thorn. Like the rest of the honey-eating family, they, of course, feed largely on the nectar of flowers.

Nest—This is built outwardly of small sticks and dry grass stems, lined with finer grasses and rootlets, and when procurable a little fur or sheep's wool. It is placed in the fork of a tree at varying heights from the ground, sometimes being at the top of the tallest available gum tree, and sometimes in a she-oak within reach of the hand. The birds are very silent about the nest, and when disturbed fly off very quietly. They are common hosts of the pallid cuckoo. The eggs are three in number, but four are not uncommonly laid. As many as six has been recorded, probably the product of more than one female.

Eggs—The eggs vary much in shape and in the distribution of the markings, but not in colour, which is fairly constant. A typical egg has a creamy white ground colour, in some instances flushed with pink, covered with irregularly shaped blotches of salmon pink, forming an indistinct zone at the larger end. Other eggs have the markings only at the large end in the form of a distinct ring, and others again are covered with small spots so as to almost hide the ground colour. Average measurement of 10 eggs—2.79 c.m. x 2.01 c.m. Largest egg, 2.90 c.m. x 2.05 c.m. Smallest egg, 2.65 c.m. x 2.00 c.m.