

BREEDING RECORD OF THE BLACK HONEYEATER AT PORT NEILL, EYRE PENINSULA

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Eckert *et al.* (1985) pointed out that the Black Honeyeater *Certhionyx niger* has been reported from Eyre Peninsula but that its occurrence there requires substantiation. In this note, I report the occurrence and breeding of Black Honeyeaters on the Peninsula.

On 5 October 1985, I saw six to ten Black Honeyeaters in a small patch of scrub on a rise adjacent to the southern edge of the township of Port Neill on Eyre Peninsula. The scrub consisted of stunted mallee, Broomebush *Melaleuca uncinata*, Porcupine Grass *Triodia irritans* and shrubs. The only eucalypt flowering at the time was Red Mallee *Eucalyptus socialis*.

A description taken from my field notes of the birds seen at Port Neill is as follows:

A small honeyeater of similar size to silvereye [*Zosterops*], with a long, slender, downcurved bill. Head all black. Back and tail black. Wings: primaries and secondaries very dark brown, coverts black. Throat black extending to a long V down the centre of the breast, the rest of the underparts white. Female: brown above, white below with a smudge of brown on the breast.

I have previously seen the very similar but larger Pied Honeyeater *Certhionyx variegatus* at Chambers Gorge in the Flinders Ranges and remember it as being larger than the birds seen at Port Neill. I also photographed the Black Honeyeaters at Port Neill.

When first seen on 5 October 1985, at 0600, the birds were hawking for insects. Later, the males were chasing each other and performing display flights. These flights consisted of an individual climbing at an angle of 45 degrees with four or five wingbeats to about three or four metres in height and then, at the top of the climb, giving a two note call before dropping down. This was repeated about five times before each bird settled on a bush. The females remained concealed in low bushes and were rarely seen. These display flights and calls are essentially similar to those described by Ford (1978) and Pizzey (1980).

By 16 October, three pairs had established territories. Only one pair was confirmed as breeding. The boundary of this pair's territory was

indicated by dead branches protruding slightly above the vegetation. The male would perch on each branch in turn for approximately one minute and repeatedly give a single note call. Display flights at this time attained a height of 10-12m and the female was only heard occasionally, uttering a soft, single note call from the nest area. The male defended the territory against other Black Honeyeaters, a Singing Honeyeater *Lichenostomus virescens* and a Tawny-crowned Honeyeater *Gliciphila melanops*. It chased the latter 50m on one occasion.

The nest was in a stunted mallee at 0.35m height. It was a small cup 55mm in diameter and 40mm deep, made of fine sticks bound with spider web, lined with hair roots and adorned with pieces of bark hanging from it. In one observation period of 30 minutes, the male fed the two nestlings every four minutes and the female was absent. The nestlings fledged on 4 November. Until 10 November, I watched the fledgelings daily for 20-30 minutes; they were fed only by the male, a female appearing only once and not near the young birds. This female chased the male, the latter performing display flights several times. My last sighting was of a male on 17 November.

In addition to insects caught on the wing, the Black Honeyeaters fed on flowers of *E. socialis*, *Prostanthera* sp., and, in gardens, *E. megacornuta*, *Eremophila bicolor*, *Eremophila calihabidos* and *Grevillea lavanderlacea*.

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