

Order Passeriformes, Family Meliphagidae,  
Genus Melithreptus

*Melithreptus gularis*—The Black-chinned Honey-eater.

BY A. M. MORGAN, M.B., B.CH.

Description.—Upper surface of head black, bordered on the occiput by a band of white, starting on each side from the bare skin behind the eye, followed by another band of black starting from the lores; back dull olive green, becoming brighter yellowish green on the rump. Under surface, centre of chin black, fading into grey on the chest and abdomen, the back chin bordered on either side by a band of white, flanks buffish grey, ear coverts black. Wing, upper surface brown; under surface lighter, each of the primaries, except the first, with the inner web dull white. Tail, dark brown, the outer web of the six central feathers faintly edged with olive green. Legs and feet brown, bill black, iris hazel. Bare skin behind eye metallic bluish green. Length (of skin) 15 c.m., wing 8.90 c.m. Female resembles the male. The young have the upper surface of the head brown, the white neutral band less distinct, the chin streak dark grey, the bill brown, and the bare skin of a dark-greenish blue.

Distribution.—The greater part of South Australia where large gum trees are to be found, but not in the dry country. In similar situations in Victoria and New South Wales. It is represented in Queensland, the Northern Territory, and North-West Australia by closely allied sub-species.

Habitat.—Open timbered country. It is rarely found in thick, scrubby, or mallee lands.

Habits.—This bird is one of a genus of short-billed Honey-eaters, evidently adapted for feeding in the Eucalypt, where a long bill is not a necessity. They are as much insect as honey eaters, and may often be seen clinging to the trunks of trees like Tree-creepers, in search of insects under the bark. As a rule they are found in pairs or small flocks of four or five. They are lively and quarrelsome birds, and often betray their presence by their penetrating note or by their fights with other birds, sometimes much larger than themselves.

Flight.—Quick and undulating. Sometimes they take quite long flights in passing from one feeding ground to another, but on the whole are local birds, and if a pair be located in a particular patch of timber one can depend on finding them in the vicinity at all times of the year.

Call.—Loud and penetrating, and rather harsh. A common call is like chip, chip, chip, chur, chur, chur, chur, the first three notes quickly repeated, the last four more drawn out and lower in tone. Another call somewhat resembles the words shoo, shoo, shoo, get back, get back, get back. In flight the call is a monotonous chip, chip, chip, etc.

Food.—Nectar and small insects from the Eucalyptus blossoms, and insects from the leaves and bark of the gum trees.

Nesting Season.—August, September, October, and November. The greater number build in October.

Nest.—A beautiful cup-shaped structure slung by the rim to the outer leaves of a gum tree branch, at a height varying from ten to fifty feet from the ground. The nest is constructed of white cow and horse hair, cobweb, and fine pieces of light-coloured bark, so firmly woven that a damp nest will hold water. Captain White watched a pair building a nest in his property at the Reedbeds, and noted that in collecting hair from his cows they chose only that which was white. Even when robbing a parti-coloured cow they always took their spoil from the white patches.

Eggs.—Two or three in number. Ground colour warm reddish brown, paler at the pointed end and deepening in shade towards the thick end, where there is an irregular zone of dark reddish-brown spots. A pair of eggs taken at Stone Hut in October, 1897, measured (1) 2.35 c.m. x 1.55 c.m. and (2) 2.20 c.m. x 1.55 c.m.

They are totally protected birds.

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