

Order Passeriformes, Family Meliphagidae,
Genus Ptilotula.

Ptilotula penicillata whitei (Mathews)—Southern White-plumed Honey-Eater.

Ptilotula penicillata whitei.—Forehead yellowish green, becoming darker towards the crown, and fading into brownish grey on the back. Lores and ear coverts, light greenish yellow. Ear coverts bordered posteriorly by a narrow line of black, behind which is a conspicuous line of white silky feathers. Back, brownish grey. Upper tail coverts, grey, tinged with green.

Chin, throat, and breast, grey, each feather tipped with yellowish green. Abdomen, grey. Thighs and flanks, grey. Under tail coverts, very light yellow.

Wing—Primaries and secondaries, outer webbs bright yellow green, inner webbs black on the upper surface; under surface, grey. The lower portion of the outer webbs of the second to sixth primaries, white.

Wing coverts—Outer webbs, yellow green; inner webbs, black.

Tail—Upper surface, two central feathers dull green; lateral feathers, outer webbs yellow green; inner webbs black, the tips narrowly edged with white. Under surface, grey.

Bill, black. Legs and feet, dark brown. Iris, black.

Average measurements:—

Total length	15.25 c.m.
Wing	8.15 c.m.
Tail	7.85 c.m.
Tarsus	1.95 c.m.
Culmen	1.15 c.m.

An exceptionally large and very darkly coloured bird in the Adelaide Museum measures:—

Total length	17.50 c.m.
Wing	8.90 c.m.
Tail	8.90 c.m.
Tarsus	2.00 c.m.
Culmen	1.30 c.m.

The sexes are alike, and the young resemble the parents in colour.

This bird, familiarly known as the greenie, is very common in the gardens, park lands, and suburbs of Adelaide, and is represented by closely allied sub-species throughout the whole of South Australia. It is a bold, familiar bird, and a keen fighter, being well able to hold its own against the sparrow and other introduced birds. They are quarrelsome with each other, and persecute the other honey-eaters. If they discover an owl sleeping in a thick clump of leaves, or a night jar asleep on a horizontal limb, they gather round it chattering and darting upon it till they succeed in driving it away. When a hawk or any other large bird comes in sight they gather together, continuously uttering the warning note, fly after it, attacking it under the wings, and whichever way the bird turns they in turn fly at him from behind.

They are a great nuisance to the sportsman, following him in numbers, continuously giving forth the alarm call, which game, animals and birds alike, seem to understand.

Song.—A loud, clear, rather melodious whistle, considerably varied, like the words "Cheep a cheep," or sometimes, "Cheep a cheep a cheep." Flight fast, and most irregular, seldom flying more than a few yards in the same direction, having a quick, short wing movement.

They are not often noticed on the wing unless in pursuit of an enemy, when they appear by the dozen as if by magic. The gum trees afford them excellent protection, the grey and green matching their own colouring perfectly. They have a habit of flying nearly vertically upwards, singing all the while, and then half closing the wings glide to the top of a neighbouring tree.

Sometimes they collect a dozen or more on a small branch, some hanging head downwards, twittering in a low tone as if in conversation, then in a moment they will disperse, flying to different trees.

They are very fond of bathing if opportunity offers, often washing several times in a day. In hot weather they drink very frequently, and seem to feel intense heat greatly. After a few hot days they may be seen collected about any surface water, panting and looking nearly worn out.

Food is most varied. The honey from flowers, which they brush out with their brush tongues. If the flower is too deep for them to reach the honey they split the corolla at the base.

They also take the insects often to be found there. They also catch flying insects, being almost as expert as a fly-catcher at hawking flying ants and small moths.

At times they attack all soft fruits, probably because the supply of honey is short, and on looking for insects in bird-picked fruit, find that it is sweet and to their taste. They will also eat bread crumbs, but are not known to eat seeds at all. They also remove the loose bark from the gum trees in search of insects, collect them from the leaves and branches, and sometimes on the ground. They are seldom, if ever found in scrub country, always keeping in their natural haunt—the big gums (*Eucalyptus rostrata*).

Nest.—A small, neat, strong, delicate looking, cup-shaped structure, made of strong wiry grasses and horse hair woven together with cobwebs. If built near a house it may contain bits of string or darning wool. It is lined with fine grasses, and sometimes thistle down, but no fur or feathers. It is suspended by the rim to the terminal branches of a tree in a thick clump of leaves varying in height from 3 ft. to 50 or 60 ft. from the ground. They are usually built in a gum tree, but not always, one being found at Stonyfell in the top of a small dog rose about 3 ft. from the ground. A favourite nesting place in the neighbourhood of Blackwood is in a wattle (*Acacia pycnantha*). The building takes a long time: one observed from the beginning at Blackwood was finished in five weeks, and another at Kallioota was still unfinished at the end of three weeks, although apparently half finished when found. Another pair at Kallioota began three nests, pulling each one down in turn, and beginning in another place, and finally left the locality without finishing any. They are erratic breeders, being both early and late, as a rule rearing two broods in a year. It is not unusual to see young birds at any season of the year except early winter.

Eggs.—Ground colour, warm pink, sparingly spotted with dark red or red brown, the spots being more numerous towards the larger end, in some eggs forming an indistinct ring. The shell is fine grained, but not glossy.

Two or three broods are reared in the year. There are usually three eggs in the first clutch, and two or only one in the later ones. The eggs of the later clutches usually have a lighter ground colour, sometimes quite white.

Incubation lasts 10 days, and the young leave the nest about 12 days later, but are fed by the parents for a long time after leaving.

Average measurement of 15 eggs, 2.05 c.m. x 1.5 c.m. Largest egg, 2.30 c.m. x 1.55 c.m. Smallest egg, 1.90 c.m. x 1.45 c.m.

Ptilotula penicillata whitei comes under the second schedule of the Bird Protection Act of 1900, being protected from July 1 to December 20.
