

THE GREY HONEYEATER (*Lacustroica whitei*) A New Record for South Australia*

By GRAHAM S. COWLES, British Museum (Natural History).

In June, 1965, the Harold Hall Expedition visited an area of arid scrub situated 19 miles S.S.W. of Granite Downs Homestead, and 130 miles W.N.W. of Oodnadatta, northern South Australia. On June 7, while collecting Yellow-tailed Thornbills *Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*, I obtained, by chance, a specimen of the Grey Honeyeater, *Lacustroica whitei*, the first record of this species from South Australia. The nearest recorded occurrence is at Boggy Pool, on the Finke River, near Henbury Station, Northern Territory, two hundred miles to the north. (Whitlock 1924).

The habitat consisted mainly of stunted Mulga (*Acacia aneura*), with associated low bush and large open areas of sandy soil. Many of the trees were heavily parasitised by mistletoe.

Description of specimen: Male, in fresh plumage tail slightly abraded. Gonads, non-breeding condition, 2 mm. in length. Head, sides of face, hind neck, back and rump,

brown grey. Faint ring of ash grey feathers around the eye. Primary and secondary flight feathers dark brown, outer margins thinly edged with olive yellow above, the inner margins edged with white below. Tail, dark brown, tipped with white. Underparts off white, washed with grey on the throat and breast. Under tail coverts white. Soft parts: Bill, black; iris, mid-brown; legs, black. Dimensions: Bill 8 mm; wing 63 mm; tail 42 mm; tarsus 18 mm.

The tongue was preserved and when microscopically examined, found to be quadrifid, not bifid as North stated (1910), with the tip frayed forming a 'brush.' It is interesting to note that the contents of the stomach consisted almost entirely of mistletoe berries.

The specimen now registered 1965.43.1008, in the British Museum (Natural History) is the only representative of the species in the collection.

The Grey Honeyeater is not only a rare bird in museum collections but is seldom, if at all, noted by field observers. From Whitlock's account of his Western Australian and Northern Territory specimens and from the observations of this specimen, it is apparent that it frequently associates with feeding parties of thornbills and consequently can become easily overlooked when in their midst. There is also an amazing superficial likeness to the adult Western Warbler *Gerygone fusca*, which although smaller resembles the honeyeaters even to the white tipped tail. Field observers should examine these species most critically when in the arid parts of the country and possibly the distribution of the small and unobtrusive Grey Honeyeater will prove to be more extensive than is at present realised.

REFERENCES

- North, A.J. 1910: Description of a New Genus and Species of Honey-eater from Western Australia, *Vict. Nat.* 26: 138-139.
Whitlock, F.L. 1924: Journey to Central Australia in search of the Night Parrot. *Emu* 23: 248-281.