

MELIPHAGIDS AND LORIKEETS NECTAR-FEEDING IN THE MOUNT LOFTY RANGES

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During a 3-day survey in the Mount Lofty Ranges (December 17-20, 1967) nectar-feeding was observed as follows:

Eucalyptus camaldulensis: Musk Lorikeet (*Glossopsitta concinna*) and Purple-crowned Lorikeet (*G. porphyrocephala*), both in flocks of 10-20. *E. leucoxylon*: Red Wattlebird (*Anthochaera carunculata*), small party. *Melaleuca hypericifolia* (introduced W.A. plant, now widely distributed in the Belair Park): Crescent Honeyeater (*Phylidonyris pyrrhoptera*) and Red Wattlebird, single individuals.

Of more significance were the meliphagids that were *not* nectar-feeding. The Noisy Miner (*Myzantha melanocephala*) and the White-plumed Honeyeater (*Meliphaga penicillata*) were common in and about the flowering River Gums but neither was seen to go near blossoms in several hours of observation. The former were feeding on insects from the outer foliage and ground, the later mainly from the canopy of the saplings and trees. The White-naped Honeyeater (*Melithreptus lunatus*) and Yellow-faced Honeyeater (*Meliphaga novaehollandiae*), occurred in numbers in the forest a mile or two away but both were feeding exclusively on insects from the canopy of the tall gums. A dozen or so Yellow-winged Honeyeaters (*Phylidonyris novaehollandiae*) occupied low shrubbery by the railway reservoir and were also exclusively insect-feeding, as was a group feeding in the canopy of gums near the Long Gully railway station. All of these individuals could easily have reached the flowering *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* if desired.

Little is known of the relative importance of insect and nectar feeding in Australian honeyeaters. Field observations with short-billed genera like *Meliphaga*, *Melithreptus*, and *Myzantha*, suggest that they are largely insectivorous. For example, during the breeding season (spring) about Sydney they are rarely, if ever, seen at blossoms (writer's observations). Likewise, *Meliphaga penicillata*, a common resident species in the River Gums (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) of western

New South Wales is largely insectivorous. Between 1957 and 1960 the writer made six 2-week transects from Dubbo to Bourke (November and March). On four of these there was no flowering and the birds were exclusively feeding on insects from the foliage. On one there were a few flowering gums with some individuals visiting the blossoms. On the other there was extensive blossoming accompanied by frequent nectar-feeding. On two extended visits to central Australia (May-June, and September), there were no flowering trees and *M. penicillata*, a very common species here, was subsisting solely on insects.

The writer would like to hear from any observers interested in undertaking a month to month survey of the food of honeyeaters. If we could obtain information as to the number of months in a year common species obtain nectar in a variety of areas we would have a much clearer picture of honeyeater diets.