

FIELD OBSERVATIONS OF THE GREY HONEYEATER IN CENTRAL AUSTRALIA

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- Received 14 January 1981; accepted 18 February 1981

The Grey Honeyeater *Conopophila whitei* has been recorded on several occasions from an extensive area of Mulga *Acacia aneura* extending east from near Hamilton Downs (23° 35' S, 133° 16' E) to within 15 kilometres of the Stuart Highway, north of Alice Springs (Parker 1969: 10; Roberts 1980: 102).

In the company of G. Ingram I observed a pair of Grey Honeyeaters in this area for over an hour on 22 May 1979. Particular note was made of the birds' calls which have been described preciously as a "silveryeye-like giggle; 'tee-de-dee', or 'tsee-you-ee' (second note higher than other two)" (Slater 1974: 218). Our notes do not support this description. The call we noted was a slightly harsh and quite loud, two-syllable 'cre-seek' with the last note higher than the first. In fact, the call was remarkably like a rapid version of the distinctive 'kisseek' of the White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina papuensis*. Another call heard could be described as a short, thick reel not unlike that uttered by Fairy-wrens *Malurus* spp. Both birds called frequently during the observation period

and the 'cre-seek' was by far the most frequent call.

The birds were feeding actively and, in addition to gleaning insects from mulga phyllodes, were seen several times feeding on the nectar of the red, tubular flowers of *Eremophila* spp. The birds obtained the nectar by probing their bills into the sides, not the mouths, of the flowers. The Grey Honeyeater has been described as "largely insectivorous but is on record as eating the berries of mistletoe" (Readers Digest 1976: 504): To my knowledge, there are no other published records of the species feeding on nectar.

As I have commented previously, the Grey Honeyeater is in my view a true meliphagid and not 'silveryeye-like' as the popular literature suggests.

REFERENCES

- Parker, S. A. 1969. New and interesting distribution records of Central Australian birds. *S. Aust. Orn.* 25:59-71.
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 Slater, P. 1974. A Field Guide to Australian Birds — Passerines. Rigby: Melbourne.

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