

## THE BROODING OF DUSKY WOODSWALLOW NESTLINGS BY NEW HOLLAND HONEYEATERS

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On 10 October 1981 whilst walking in Mount Rescue Conservation Park, 16 km north of Keith, I disturbed a New Holland Honeyeater *Phylidonyris novaehollandiae* from its nest in a *Banksia ornata*. The nest, which contained three small young, was made from thin twigs and plant material tightly woven into a neat cup and lined with pieces of *Banksia* flower. It was approximately one metre from the ground.

A few minutes later I saw another New Holland Honeyeater fly from a *Banksia ornata* just ahead of me and, on investigating, I found a second nest containing two well-developed young. It was bulkier than the first, rather loosely constructed of twigs and appeared to be unlined. It was placed in a cleft about one metre from the ground. As I walked away I was attacked by a Dusky Woodswallow *Artamus cyanopterus*, which surprised me as I had assumed this nest also belonged to a New Holland Honeyeater. The Dusky Woodswallow was seen to fly to the nest, feed the young and collect a faecal sac. I had no doubt that the nest was that of the woodswallow.

Whilst photographing the woodswallows a little later I became aware that New Holland Honeyeaters were always in the vicinity and frequently approached the nest. After completing my photography I remained in the area and during the next hour or so the honeyeaters were more frequently at the nest than the woodswallows. On several occasions a New Holland Honeyeater brooded the young woodswallows. On other occasions, one or more of the honeyeaters tidied the nest, removing small pieces of twig or pushing at the nest to form a neater cup. Although the honeyeaters were not observed to feed the young woodswallows it appeared as if they were attempting to do so. No food was brought in by

the honeyeaters but they were observed to stand on the nest looking down at the young woodswallows, the latter greeting them with loud calls and open gapes exactly as they did their true parents. It appeared as if the honeyeaters were somewhat frustrated at not being able to respond to the woodswallows' calls for food.

The adult Dusky Woodswallows did not seem unduly worried by this intrusion into their territory and on only two occasions was aggression shown towards the honeyeaters. The first was when a woodswallow returned with food and found a honeyeater brooding its young. It swooped directly at the honeyeater and dislodged it. On the second occasion, the woodswallow was brooding its young when a honeyeater alighted alongside; it pecked at the honeyeater which flew off. On several occasions the honeyeaters joined the woodswallows in a nearby tree, sitting with them and preening.

It appeared that several honeyeaters were involved as at least three were often simultaneously in the vicinity of the nest. However, it seemed to me that one individual did most of the brooding and tidying of the nest.

Two days later I returned to see whether the events were isolated. Within a few minutes of my arrival the honeyeaters were in the *Banksia* with one bird sitting on the woodswallow's nest.

In my view the most likely explanation for this apparently unusual behaviour is that at the time there was a good deal of breeding activity in the area and the honeyeaters were possibly reacting to the stimulus of the young woodswallows.

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