

PAINTED HONEYEATER IN NORTH-EASTERN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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INTRODUCTION

The Painted Honeyeater *Grantiella picta* has been reported four times from South Australia, twice from the North-East, once from the South-East (Matheson 1981) and once from the Lower North (Woodcock 1984). Its rarity in this State continues to excite interest in those who locate it here. The following observation of a Painted Honeyeater was made near the Cannuwaukaninna dune 16 km WSW of Etudanna homestead on Etudanna Station, 28 45' S, 138 28' E, on 1 August 1984.

DESCRIPTION

The bird appeared to be about the size of a Singing Honeyeater *Meliphaga virescens*, but with a shorter tail so that its proportions were like those of the *Melithrepus* honeyeaters. The bill was reddish-pink with dark tip; plumage of head to back, dark grey; yellow on wing, eye dark, white feather behind eye, throat and breast white.

Food

The bird was seen in two large Elegant Wattles *Acacia victoriae*, heavily infested with the Wire-leaf Mistletoe *Amyema preissii*. Some of the mistletoe was laden with soft, round, pale-pink berries and the bird was seen to eat these rapidly, swallowing four in as many seconds.

Habitat

To the west of the observation site is the Tirari Desert with Sandhill Canegrass *Zygochloa paradoxa* and *Acacia ligulata* on the sand-ridges and *A. victoriae* and *A. murrayana* between the dunes. To the east is saltbush country with scattered Coolibah *Eucalyptus microtheca* and *A. victoriae*. Northward is the floodplain of the Cooper Creek with woodland of Coolibah and Box *E. largiflorens*, *A. salicina* and Lignum *Muehlenbeckia cunninghamii*.

Acacia victoriae and *A. murrayana* are frequently parasitised by mistletoe *Amyema* sp. and the Coolibah is subject to infestation with the mistletoe *Diplatia grandibractea*.

DISCUSSION

This sighting is the only one resulting from about 64 days spent in the area over a 4 year period comprising 5 separate visits falling within the seasonal range, June-September. The three records from this region, reported by Matheson (1981), fall in the period May-August, but, before any inference about seasonal movement within this state can be made, one should consider the habits of observers, who prefer to visit this part of the country in winter.

The Painted Honeyeater is generally reported to depend upon mistletoe fruits (Officer 1964). The bird observed by Woodcock (1984) was feeding on the flowers of *Amyema miquelii*. The distribution of *Acacia victoriae* and *A. murrayana* with their associated mistletoes may provide an even wider choice of habitat for this species, than the Mulga, Black Oak and water-course vegetation mentioned by Matheson (1981). In time it may be possible to learn more about the use the Painted Honeyeater makes of this vast expanse of apparently useful habitat.

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