

CONSPECIFIC AND CO-OPERATIVE KILLING BEHAVIOUR IN NEW HOLLAND HONEYEATERS. On 17 June 1997 at approximately 1400 h, seven or eight New Holland Honeyeaters *Phylidonyris novaehollandiae* were observed swarming over another bird in the gutter of Cremorne St, Malvern, South Australia. They were seen screeching around the other bird and several were seen vigorously pecking it. When the aggressors were approached they rapidly dispersed into a nearby *Melaleuca* sp. The bird they were attacking was a New Holland Honeyeater, which remained in the gutter and died within a few minutes. There was no apparent damage to the bones of the bird, but an examination revealed numerous small marks on the back of the head that were bleeding. These were consistent with those that could be made with the sharp beak of a honeyeater. The bird was also missing patches of feathers in this area.

The bird was an immature male, approximately one year old based on the primary wing coverts being very old and the incomplete primary moult (Paton 1982a). Sex was determined by the relatively large size of the bird and the presence of gonads (Paton 1982b).

There are many reports of corroboree behaviour for New Holland Honeyeaters (i.e. birds with nearby territories flocking together) (Pyke and O'Connor 1989; McFarland 1995), but relatively few reports of 'co-operative' behaviour in this species (McFarland 1995). The reduction in inter-neighbour aggression is believed to be the major function of corroboree behaviour, and co-operative behaviour is a beneficial side effect (McFarland 1995). This sighting may have been a rare instance of co-operative behaviour between individuals in a neighbourhood killing a transient conspecific

bird.

Other Honeyeaters, notably the co-operative *Manorina* spp., are highly aggressive towards other species of birds, and are known to have killed individuals of several species including kingfishers, finches and pardalotes (Dow 1978). New Holland Honeyeaters often defend feeding and breeding territories and aggressively displace subordinate conspecific birds and other species of honeyeater and pardalotes (Paton 1979; McFarland 1995). They have also been known to grasp subordinates with their feet and drag them off perches, the two birds sometimes tumbling to the ground (Paton 1979; D. Paton pers. comm.). Given the potential of serious injury and/or death, subordinate individuals should readily flee from an attacker. Such behaviour would limit the frequency of fatal conspecific attacks.

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Received: 7 April 1998