

BRIEF STAY BY A YELLOW-TUFTED HONEYEATER *Lichenostomus melanops* NEAR MOUNT GAMBIE, SOUTH AUSTRALIA. The Yellow-tufted Honeyeater inhabits eucalypt forests and woodlands of south eastern Australia. Schodde and Mason (1999) recognise three sub-species (*cassidix*, *meltoni*, and *melanops*) with *L.m. meltoni* known to occur in South Australia (SA). Pizzey and Knight (2000) describe *L.m. meltoni* ranging as far west as the Naracoorte region in the South East of SA. Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters are very infrequent visitors to SA (Simpson and Day 1996) and have no state conservation rating (*National Parks and Wildlife Act, 1972*).

The Yellow-tufted Honeyeater breeds from July to April (Higgins, Peter and Steele 2001), feeding predominantly on honeydew, manna and lerp during this time (Blakers, Davies and Reilly 1984). It also feeds on nectar, insects and spiders. The Yellow-tufted Honeyeater is mobile in autumn and winter with *L.m. meltoni* known for moving the greatest distances (Blakers *et al.* 1984). The Yellow-tufted Honeyeater favours sites where manna gum *Eucalyptus viminalis*, swamp gum *E. ovata* and apple box *E. bridgesiana* dominate (Frith 1982). It forages among foliage and bark in the canopy of trees and shrubs with occasional visits to the ground (Higgins *et al.* 2001).

In SA most sightings of this species have occurred in the Lower South East (LSE), mainly in the Naracoorte, Bool Lagoon and Big Heath area. J.B. Hood recorded the state's first Yellow-tufted Honeyeater on 6 August 1939 at Killanoola near Joanna, c. 19 km SSE of Naracoorte (Hood and Attiwill 1958). One to five birds have been recorded in the same area in 1968, 1977 and 1980 (Glover 1969; Bransbury 1982). Further south near Mt Gambier, M. White observed one bird at Yahl in 1959 (Condon 1959) and at least two birds were recorded at Kalangadoo (Blakers *et al.* 1984). A local naturalist, P. Penney, noted seeing one bird in the 1960s (P. Penney, pers. comm. 2002).

There is a northern record from the Upper South East/Murray Mallee of five Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters in the Geranium area during 8–15 May 1983 (Mr and Mrs D.A. Nankivell, and E.D. and L.R. Garrett in SAOA 1983).

This note reports a rare sighting of a Yellow-tufted Honeyeater near Mt Gambier. I observed one on four occasions during 10–15 May 2002

on my 15 acre (6 ha) property 5 km SW of Mount Gambier (37°52'S, 140°44'E). On the first occasion it was observed exploring and foraging in the 2–6 m high native gum trees in the company of a Yellow-faced Honeyeater *Lichenostomus chrysops*. It was the first sighting of a Yellow-faced Honeyeater on our property this year. Many Yellow-faced Honeyeaters passed through the property the same day, sometimes in flocks of up to 30 birds. I have not previously observed this number of honeyeaters flying through our property.

I was absent during 11–12 May, but sighted a Yellow-tufted Honeyeater again on three occasions from 13 to 15 May. No Yellow-faced Honeyeaters were observed on 14–15 May.

My observations were in the morning from 0800 to 0930 h CST and made using 10x50 binoculars. Only one individual was seen at any time so I presumed it to be the same bird.

In 1996, my property was fairly devoid of native vegetation, except for a small L-shaped wind-break of approximately 60 native trees planted by the previous owners. Now in 2002 approximately 25% of the property has been de-stocked and is being planted to local native trees and shrubs. The dominant overstorey species are rough-barked manna-gum *Eucalyptus viminalis* *cygnetensis*, brown stringybark *E. baxteri*, blackwood *Acacia melanoxylon*, golden wattle *A. pycnantha*, and braced honey-myrtle *Melaleuca armillaris* (the latter being non-indigenous to SA). The remaining 75% is grazing land. *E. viminalis* *cygnetensis* is by far the most dominant tree on the property and can be 2–6 m high. Most plantings of the above species are four years old. The Yellow-tufted Honeyeater was only observed foraging in *E. viminalis* *cygnetensis*.

The bird I observed on each day is best described by Frith (1982). The features I used to identify the bird included a bright yellow ear tuft, olive green/yellow forehead, cap and nape, bright yellow chin and throat with dark central line and olive green wing markings. On several occasions I heard a very soft and nondescript call.

I saw the bird foraging, preening and chasing other birds. Most of the time I observed it foraging, moving up each tree gleaning the leaves for invertebrates, spiders and manna, then regularly dropping to lower branches from which it would proceed to move up the tree again. No native trees were flowering on the property at the time.

On 14 May several photographs were taken of

the bird (see Figure). It was accompanied by many Silvereyes *Zosterops lateralis*, Yellow-rumped Thornbills *Acanthiza chrysorrhoa* and the occasional Red Wattlebird *Anthochaera carunculata*, New Holland Honeyeater *Phylidonyris novaehollandiae* and Singing Honeyeater *Lichenostomus virescens*. On this day I observed the Yellow-tufted Honeyeater chasing a Singing Honeyeater away. It was the first time a Singing Honeyeater was recorded for our property.

This record appears to be the only published sighting of a Yellow-tufted Honeyeater in the last five years in SA and is one of very few for the LSE in the past 40 years. Most interesting is that this sighting coincided with the influx of many Yellow-faced Honeyeaters into the district, presumably on a westerly migration. Is it possible that a Yellow-tufted Honeyeater was part of this traditional seasonal movement by Yellow-faced Honeyeaters and hitched a ride to later find refuge at a 'manna-gum oasis' in a landscape of open, cleared farming land.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Peter Penney for his enthusiasm when told of this sighting, encouragement to report it and information about his historic sighting from the 1960s. Bob Green, Vicki Natt, Brian Blaylock, Jack Bourne, Colin Rogers and David Edey helped in formatting, sourcing references and/or providing comments on a draft

of this note. Graham Carpenter and Keith Casperson provided advice on previous sightings in SA from Birds SA, and Birds Australia Atlas records.

REFERENCES

- Blakers, M., Davies, S.J.J.F. and Reilly, P.N. 1984. *The atlas of Australian birds*. RAOU and Melbourne University Press, Melbourne.
- Bransbury, J. 1982. Bird report, 1977-81. *South Australian Ornithologist*, 29 (5 & 6), 121-168.
- Condon, H.T. 1959. Another South Australian record of the Yellow-tufted Honeyeater. *South Australian Ornithologist*, 23 (1-2), 29.
- Frith, H. (ed.). 1982. *Reader's Digest complete book of Australian birds*. First edition. Reader's Digest, Sydney.
- Glover, B. 1969. Bird report, 1967-68. *South Australian Ornithologist*, 25 (3), 72-84.
- Higgins, P.J., Peter, J.M. and Steele, W.K. (eds). 2001. *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic birds. Volume 5, tyrant-flycatchers to chats*. Oxford University Press, Melbourne.
- Hood, J.B. and Attiwill, A.R. 1958. The Yellow-tufted Honeyeater—a new record for South Australia. *South Australian Ornithologist*, 22 (5-6), 58.
- SAOA. 1983. Bird notes. *SAOA Newsletter*, 107, 11.
- Schodde, R. and Mason, I.J. 1999. *The directory of Australian birds: passerines*. CSIRO, Collingwood, Victoria.
- Simpson, K. and Day, N. 1996. *Field guide to the birds of Australia*. Sixth edition. Penguin books, Melbourne.
- Pizzey, G. and Knight, F. 2000. *Field guide to the birds of Australia*. Angus and Robertson, Sydney.

Bryan Haywood: CMB, Moorak, S.A. 5291

Received 21 August 2002; accepted 25 October 2002



Figure. Yellow-tufted Honeyeater at Bryton Wood, Moorak in May 2002 (Photographer BH).