

Regent Honey-eaters—Visit to the Adelaide Plains.

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The most remarkable bird noted for May, 1919, and the most pleasing record that I have made for the district of Lockleys, S.A., was the sudden appearance of the Regent Honey-eater (*Zanthoniza phrygia tregellasi*) during the latter part of April and early part of May. Although I kept a sharp lookout for the bird in other parts of the district, I was unable to detect it elsewhere than on my estate. The fine old gum trees here seemed especially to attract them, the native blue gum being the favourite, for it was amongst the gnarled boughs and limbs of these trees that the Regent Honey-eaters made their chief abode during their brief stay with us. They were evidently migrating, but from whence they came, or whither they went no data has been obtainable. I assumed that they were making for the Mount Lofty Ranges, as they have often been recorded by our local naturalists about Blackwood and Belair, and at

higher elevations in the ranges. Upon making enquiries after the birds' departure, however, I found that they had not made the Adelaide hills their rendezvous. Their visit to the Adelaide Plains I believe is unique, and it will be interesting to note whether, having once made this their line of migration, they will repeat the route in future seasons. The suddenness, of their appearance, and their equally quick disappearance, left no doubt in my mind that they were migrating rapidly, most likely forced on their journey by the exceptionally dry season experienced in this State. While they were with us they proved a beautiful sight and kept the locality gay with their bright plumage and remarkably sweet and continuous song. The latter is a flute-like warble, of silvery liquid notes, not unlike the song of the Oriole, but more lively and continuous.

The tameness of the birds was especially noticeable. They even came to the back door, and three or four at a time would drink at a bucket beneath the tap, or suck the water as it dripped from the nozzle of the tap. They were in numbers, even in the fowls' yard, and here I was able to note their habits at close quarters. Their food consisted chiefly of insects, which they sometimes caught in the gnarled boughs of the old gum trees, but principally by sallying out on the wing to catch them in mid air, and then flying to a neighbouring bough to eat the captured tit-bit.

The following notes from my ornithological notebook may be of interest to show the exact dates of arrival and departure, etc.—

April 28, 1919—"I noted a small covey of what I took to be these birds (*Regent Honey-eaters*) flying from a gum tree at Lockleys, late in the afternoon, there was about a dozen."

April 29,—"I made sure of the identity of the birds, by shooting one in a gum tree in the fowls' yard, there being several birds about during the day, but I did not get more than the one specimen, which I was exceedingly pleased to secure, as it was the first time that I had noted the birds down here. They were making a very sweet and pleasing warbling whistle, not unlike the notes of the Oriole, but not nearly so powerful, and continued this melody at intervals all day, as they searched amongst the boughs of the gum trees for their food. Ever and anon they sallied forth after a beetle, which they caught on the wing, and then flew into a tree to eat it."

April 30.—“Quite a number of these beautiful honey-eaters was about, and they even came to the back door, and drank from a bucket. They also came after insects in the fowls’ yard, there being no honey producing blossoms out. The sweet warbling notes were very pleasing, and being very ventriloquial, it seemed that they were in quite another part of the tree, or even in an adjoining one.”

May 1.—“I was greatly surprised on rising early to find that large numbers of the Regent Honey-eaters had arrived and were sporting about in the trees right at the back door. Before the sun rose, a large tree near by, contained numbers of them. In a short time, more and still more flew into the same tree, until it was literally alive with these gems of the honey-eating family. There must have been scores of them, all hopping about in the green foliage making the small boughs shake all over the tree. The birds seemed as though they were having an early morning bath from the damp leaves, and as the sun rose and shed its bright light on the scene, it made a beautiful and gorgeous sight. The bright yellow mixed with the black feathers of the birds shone out like gold as the sun gradually mounted. Everything seemed to sparkle, and it would be hard to find a more handsome sight than these glorious little birds presented. I went quite close to get the full view of the scene, but did not disturb their early morning meeting.

The long dry season in all probability was responsible for the appearance of the birds, as I had not seen them down here before, although they had been in the Mount Lofty Ranges in previous seasons, notably at Blackwood, but I think even there they could not have been so numerous as they have been at Lockleys to-day.”

May 2.—“Regent Honey-eaters still numerous, and several come to drink at the tap at the back door, quite tame and confiding.”

May 3.—“Birds still numerous in the trees.”

May 4.—“Regent honey-eaters about, but very scarce.”

May 5.—“Only saw one, the birds having gone as quickly as they came.”

May 6.—“Not a trace of the Regent honey-eaters left. They seem to have stayed only with us during their visit, for although I kept a sharp lookout for them elsewhere, in all likely places, I saw no sign of them.”