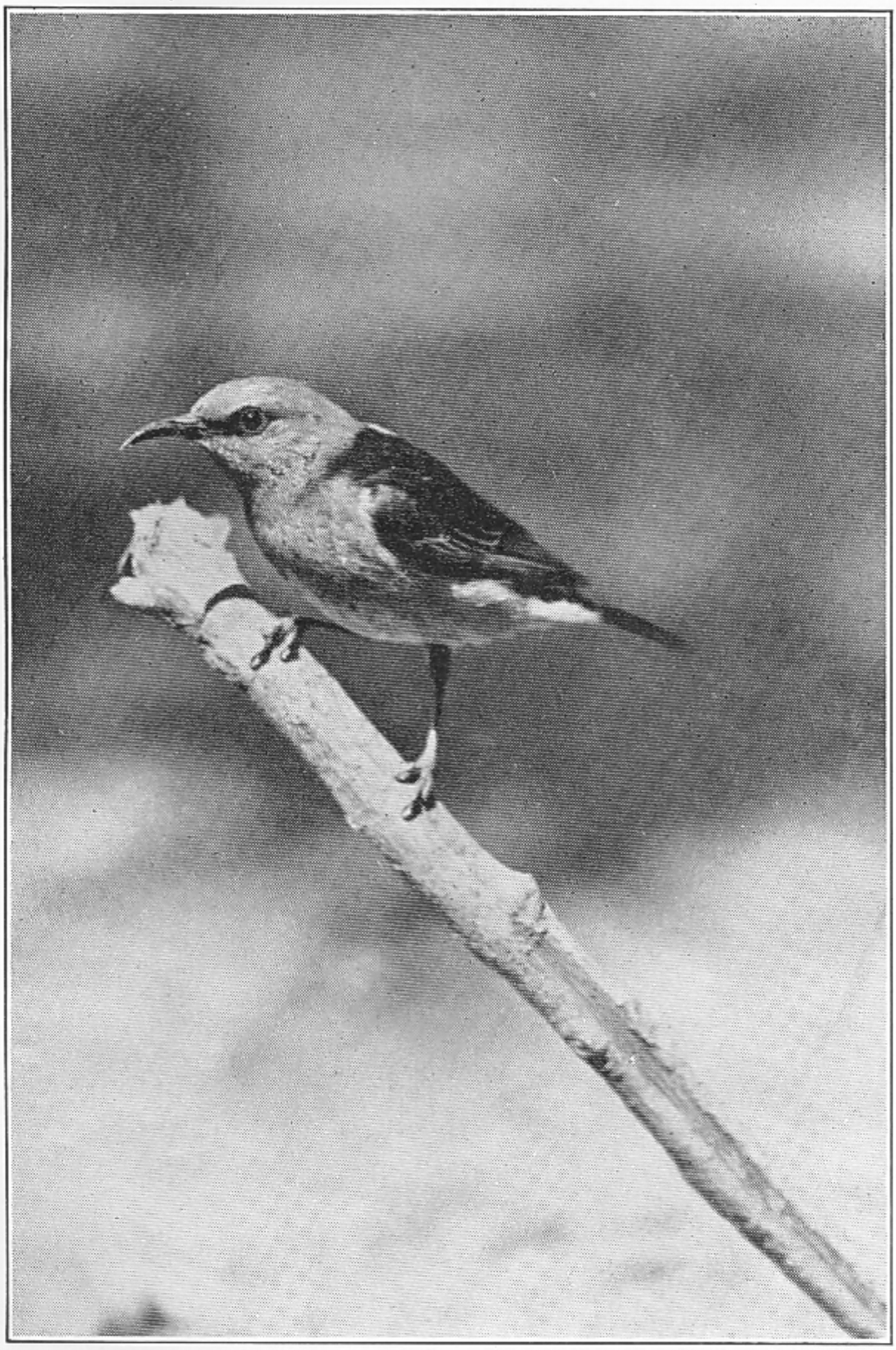
# Triple Nesting of the Scarlet Honeyeater

By H. WOLSTENHOLME, M.B.O.U., Wahroonga, Sydney.

The lovely Scarlet Honeyeater (*Myzomela sanguinolenta*), commonly known in New South Wales as the Blood bird, is the smallest and most brightly coloured (the male bird only) of Sydney's many Honeyeaters. It seemed to be more plentiful than usual this summer at Wahroonga, an outer northern suburb of Sydney, where every year the birds arrive from the north, during September generally, and leave in March when the nesting season is over. In this locality there are, among the various bird families, many summer visitors or migrants, but this little Honeyeater alone out of the Honeyeater family can be placed among them. Towards the end of October I heard from Dr. H. M. de Burgh, of Sydney, who lives at Wahroonga, that a pair of Scarlet Honeyeaters had a nest in a large Turpentine tree (*Syncarpia laurifolia*) in his vegetable garden. I inspected the nest and visited the place on subsequent occasions to watch the doings of the little birds. From these observations and from particulars supplied by Dr. de Burgh I made the following notes of three successive nestings in the same tree from October, 1929, to January, 1930. The first nest—it was a somewhat flimsy structure in the shape of a little cup and made of fresh red bark (as always in my experience)—was suspended in the middle of a dangling clump of leaves about five feet from the ground. The two eggs were almost white in colour with some brown blotches at the larger end. The incubation period was about eleven days. On October 28 I saw that the nestlings were about to leave the nest,* and I learnt afterwards they left on November 1—that was about twelve days after being hatched. They were fed by the parents for about ten days longer, so far as one could tell. With but a few days' rest the old birds must then have begun to prepare for a second brood, for a nest was made on the other side of the tree in a similar hanging branch about twenty feet from the ground in a position impossible for close observation. The young birds left this second nest about December 15. After due attention to them the parent birds a day or two later set about raising still another brood, and a third nest was made, this time close to the first one, about twelve feet from it and ten feet from the ground and well hidden in the same sort of dangling leafy branch. The baby birds were hatched about January 16, and on January 26 I saw that they would be leaving

*I informed Mr. N. Chaffer of this nest and he took some pictures.



Male Scarlet Honeyeater.

Photo. by N. Chaffer, R.A.O.U.

the nest shortly, for they chirrupped after the manner of hungry nestlings at the approach of their parents with food.

During the time the young birds were in the nest the father bird was more energetic in his movements and in his singing than his sober coloured little mate—a shade smaller than himself—who, indeed, has no song (as far as I know) and was silent during her movements to and from the nest except for a few chirps now and then when they met and fluttered together in play. She is rarely seen unless a nest is being observed. He, too, was the more assiduous in the work of feeding the babies and did not seem to mind our presence beside the nest. At such close range the abundant scarlet of his head and body shone extra brightly in the sunshine, and his gentle tinkling notes, amplified in sound through being so near, were more than usually pleasing to the ear; for as a rule it is from up in the high eucalypts that the light tinkles float down ventriloquially to the listener, in the same way that from another invisible source in the tree tops the sweet gently-falling notes of a second lovely little summer visitor to Wahroonga, the White-throated Warbler (*Gerygone olivacea*), charm the ear of the bush lover: both these delightful species are so much more often heard than seen.

The food of the Blood bird consisted largely of gnats and other small flying insects which he would snap up (I saw the male bird only do this) in his long curved honeyeater bill with the speed and dexterity that one is accustomed to only from an expert member of the flycatcher family. Other food seemed to be collected from leaves and leaf-stalks.

There can be no reasonable doubt, I think, that it was the same pair of birds that made these three nests. From our joint observations the duration of the progressive stages in the breeding operations appeared to be as follows, approximately:—Building of nest and laying of eggs, 8 days; incubation of eggs, 11 or 12 days; young in nest, 11 or 12 days; young fed by parents after leaving nest, about 10 days.

This triple nesting of a pair of Blood birds brings clearly to my mind a similar happening that I witnessed in the early eighties of the last century. With a schoolmate I used to spend frequent Saturdays "out in the bush," as we called it, the site of this particular "bush" being occupied nowadays by some of Sydney's densely populated western suburbs. One day we found amongst the leaves of a Turpentine tree about four feet from the ground a Blood bird's nest containing two eggs. These we took nest and all.

About three weeks later we found another nest and two eggs almost at the same spot in the tree. This nest and eggs also we gathered in. Visiting the tree a few weeks later we were surprised to find again in the same position in the tree a third nest. This, I am glad to remember, we did not touch.

Scarlet Honeyeaters are fond of leafy trees for their nests, and the little cups of red bark are usually well hidden by foliage. The Turpentine, a handsome tree with abundant leafage, which grows largely in the Wianamatta shale formation of the Sydney district, is therefore much favoured by these Honeyeaters for nesting purposes. Most of their nests that I have seen in the northern suburbs of Sydney have been in these trees. I have found nests also in the Sweet Pittosporum (*P. undulatum*) in gardens, and *Melaleuca spp.* in the bush (both having thick leafage and honey-laden blossoms), one nest only in a Eucalypt and one in a small pine tree (*Pinus insignis*), which same pine in a later season held, hidden among its thick needle leaves, the nest of a Spinebill Honeyeater (*Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris*). What a number of birds like pine trees for their nests! In *Pinus insignis* alone I have seen the nests of over twenty species, from the Magpie to the Mistletoe Bird.

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# The Scarlet Honeyeater

By N. CHAFFER, R.A.O.U., Roseville, N.S.W.

Among the numerous species of Honeyeaters distributed throughout Australia, I know of none so charming as the Scarlet Honeyeater (*Myzomela sanguineolenta*). It is familiarly known as the Blood bird on account of the vivid colouring of the male, and is the possessor of a cheerful animated song in quality far above the average of Honeyeaters' songs. The song, too, is continuously uttered throughout the day. The quiet brown colouring and absence of song of the female renders her very inconspicuous. Away from the nest she is not often seen. She is, however, very vivacious in movement and elegant in build. The Blood bird is one of the smallest of the Honeyeaters, other members of the genus *Myzomela* being the only ones comparable to it in size. The scarlet, too, is not found in any other genus of that group. Each spring I look forward with pleasure for the return of the little creatures from their annual northerly migration.

My first recollection of the birds is in association with the red bottle brush flowers. A particular patch of shrubs