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Notes on the Blue-faced Honeyeater

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The Blue-faced Honeyeater (*Entomyzon cyanotis*), the 'Gympie' of the bushman, is an attractive bird not only because of its sleek form and pretty colouring but also on account of its interesting nesting and general habits and its varied call notes.

The green back, velvety-black neck and head divided by the white line across the nape, dark 'bib' and white under-surface, and the bright blue brow and the purple-blue patch behind the eye place the Gympie amongst our really attractive birds.

With my semi-tame birds I find that three nestings take place during the year—in July, November and February—and the young birds leave the nest in September, January and April. Two young birds form the normal brood and only rarely are there three. At times only one young bird leaves the nest. In such cases it is probable that an egg has been infertile or that some accident has happened to the other nestling.

When babblers' nests are procurable they are chosen by the Gympies instead of their building nests of their own. When it becomes necessary for the birds to build their own home they make a solid job of their work by selecting a tree fork where two branches form a narrow V. If a third branch happens to be handy so much the better. The nest is composed of shredded bark moulded into a deep cup which is heavily lined with horse or cow hair, long

strands from the animals' tails being preferred. I have seen bush Blue-faced Honeyeaters occupying nests of the Noisy Friar-bird, and I am sure other suitable nests, such as those of butcher-birds, Magpies and currawongs would be used when required. It is not unusual for Gympies to add material on top of old flattened babbler nests. Actually they use the old nest as a base on which to place their own nest.

When the young birds leave the nest they are very similar to the adult bird in size and general colour, but it is noticeable that the 'bib' is lighter coloured than that of the parent and the brow is bare and flesh coloured. After the young have been two months out of the nest the brow becomes pale green. The green colouring soon develops into a bright green shade, gradually becoming more pronounced until the bird is six months of age at which time the blue colouring begins to show. At eight months the brow becomes bright blue but not so pronounced as in the adult. When the bird reaches twelve months of age it assumes the full blue brow of the adult and the former black patch behind the eye develops into the beautiful purple-blue colour of the mature bird. The large black bill at all times shows a distinct pale yellow band at the base.

The call of the adult bird has many variations. Some notes are harsh but others are clear and attractive. When a bird is feeding its mate at the nest, and when parents are feeding nestlings, they use a soft 'chirping' call suggestive of affection. The call will draw one's attention to the nesting birds even if one had not been aware previously that a nest was there.

For food the adults and growing young will eat almost anything that is available. With birds around the house most of the food is gathered from the scrap tin, and from food placed out for poultry. Soft fruits are eaten freely and insects are consumed with relish. Nectar, when obtainable from blossoms, is always attractive, and empty jam, honey or syrup tins are well explored for the tit-bits that may be contained therein. When nestlings are very young an insect, fruit and nectar diet is fed to them, but after a couple of weeks they go on to the same diet as the parents. The Gympie is very partial to milk and will consume unlimited quantities of it.

It is interesting to note that parents, when feeding young birds at the nest, will travel constantly from milk containers to the nest, presumably taking milk to their young. I assume that, when young birds are being given a milk diet, it is regurgitated by the parents. The birds call constantly when in flight to the nest so could not carry it in the beak otherwise.