

## Meliphaga Notata, alias "Jacky."

By A. H. CHISHOLM, C.F.A.O.U., Sydney.

LOOKING through my file of the *Emu*, recently, I came upon various notes and queries relating to a little-known Honeyeater, and have put them together for comment in the light of some personal experience.

The first observation of interest is contained in a paper by Mr. A. J. Campbell, on "Birds of Rockingham Bay District," in 1917 (p. 106). There a query is raised concerning two species of *Meliphaga* (= *Ptilotis*). Mr. Campbell and Mr. H. G. Barnard, it seems, experienced difficulty in adjudicating between *M. lewinii*, the common Yellow-eared Honeyeater, and *M. notata*, the Yellow-spotted Honeyeater. They had an impression that certain Honeyeaters observed on the lowlands near Cardwell might be *M. notata*, but the only specimen taken proved to be *M. lewinii*. So they referred their notes on the subject to the latter species, and added the question, "Can the commonly-reputed *notata* of collectors, after all, be a northern form only of the widely distributed *lewinii*?"

The next allusion to this case—or a case in affinity—appears in Vol. 18 of the *Emu* (1918, p. 142), in a review of the late E. J. Banfield's third book, *Tropic Days*. Here it is suggested that it would have been interesting had Mr. Banfield given the name of the "cheeky" Honeyeater that invaded his premises after ripe bananas. "Possibly," says the reviewer, "it was a northern variety of the Yellow-eared Honeyeater (*Ptilotis lewinii*)."

Now, the point in taking these two notes in conjunction lies in the fact that *M. notata*, of the Rockingham Bay district and further north, is certainly a good species (not merely a form of the Yellow-ear) and in the fact that this is the "cheeky" Honeyeater, of *Tropic Days*. I came to know the enterprising bird, when visiting Dunk Island in 1921, under the familiar name of "Jacky." He was quite a member of the Banfield family. Having a particular fancy for ripe bananas, he would fly, frequently and freely, into a shed adjoining the kitchen and help himself. And what a protest arose if the door chanced to be closed!—then the placid air of the isle was rent by the indignant shrilling of the bird.

As to the formal identity of "Jacky," Mr. Banfield was at sea; he had questioned a couple of previous ornithological visitors to the isle, he said, but they could not be at all sure of the species. For myself, I placed the bird as being a member of the group of Honeyeaters whose diet seems to be almost entirely frugivorous, and which lay eggs with a pure white background—as distinct from the pink background of the nectar-lovers' eggs. It was smaller than the common Yellow-ear, lacked the vivid ear-tufts, and was less strident in voice. This much was noted as "Jacky" flitted about the house. Later, I took a specimen in hand when visiting the mainland opposite the island—a few miles north of Cardwell. A nest was built, about four feet from the ground, in a small bush beside a path. Never hav-

ing been disturbed by the few people who passed that way, the brooding bird was perfectly tame, and I had no difficulty in lifting her from the cradle. Measurements and color notes were secured, the detaining hand was opened, and the puzzled bird flew off back to the scrub. These observations were sufficient to decide the point; the bird was undoubtedly *M. notata*,\* and specifically distinct from *M. chrysotis*.

The latter conclusion, by the way, was reached by Mr. Campbell in 1920, for in the *Emu* of that year (p. 63) he inferentially answers his own Cardwell query in the negative. Commenting upon skins obtained for Mr. H. L. White on Torres Strait islands, he says that "*P. notata*, besides being smaller, is lighter-coloured and more yellowish on the under-surface than *P. chrysotis*." Certainly, however, it is curious that these closely-related birds should "rub shoulders" as they do in the Cardwell district, though, for my own part, I did not see any Yellow-ears there, whereas the Yellow-spotted bird was fairly numerous on Dunk Island.

It follows almost as a matter of course that nests and eggs in both cases are much alike. The dainty cradle of *M. notata* had the same soft lining that one finds in the nests of the common Yellow-ear, and the eggs had that white background so distinct from the eggs of Honey-birds generally. I regretted being overtaken by darkness when inspecting the nest, for the trustful bird was a most inviting subject for photography. As matters were, my interest in the subject caused me to be marooned on the mainland all night,—at which stage it was rather cold comfort to reflect that this was the spot made famous by Macgillivray of the *Rattlesnake*, and other early naturalists.

It remains to be added that when, after returning to Brisbane with the description of the bird and fixing its identity, I notified "Beachcomber" Banfield on the point, he was only politely interested. "So," he wrote, "our 'Jacky' is officially known as *Ptilotis notata*. We shall still call him 'Jacky'!"

---

**Bird Friends of a Kangaroo.**—There are two little birds that come into the garden to a pet "Joey" kangaroo. They sit on the kangaroo and scratch and peck busily, the kangaroo seeming quite pleased to have them though they pull hairs out and scratch violently. They are not very tame and we have not been able to get a good look at them nor can we find them in Leach's Australian Bird Book. They have a strong bill like the finches, but are smaller than the Spotted-sided Finch and the Double-banded Finch which are plentiful here. They are greyish brown, very much the colour of the kangaroo. This kangaroo will not allow the Wagtails or other birds to come near him, but seems very friendly with these birds—the children call them "Joey's birds"—and none of us have ever noticed them before.—C. MAY WRIGHT, Wongwibinda, Armidale, N.S.W.

---

\*A coloured plate of *M. notata* appears in the *Emu*, Vol. 20, Pl. 5.



FIG. 1.

Nest (found) of the YELLOW-SPOTTED HONEYEATER. Although taken at dusk, the picture illustrates the dainty nature of the nest.

Photo. by A. H. Gisholt.

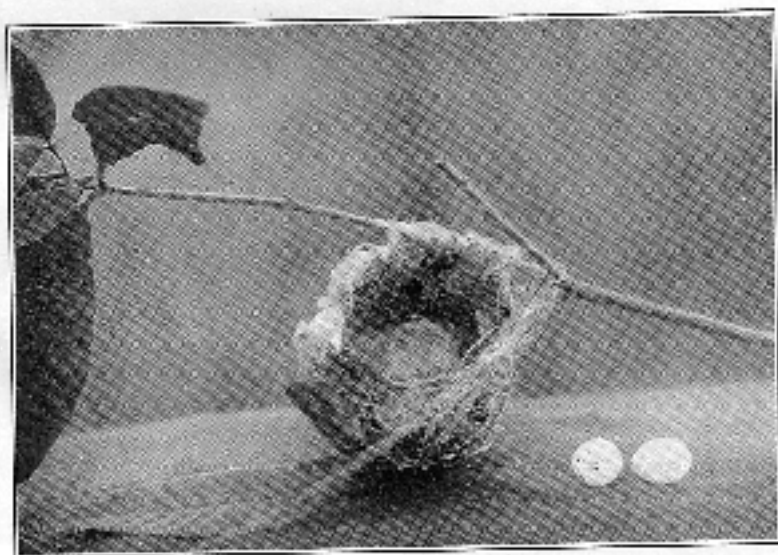


FIG. 2.

Nest (showing soft lining) and eggs of the YELLOW-SPOTTED HONEYEATER.  
Photo. by A. H. Gisholt.