

Tasmanian booksellers reported a continuance of the keen demand for Australian bird books, as well as works dealing with natural history in a general way.

While protection has been extended to most of the birds of prey in Tasmania, the Branch has not been satisfied that this has been put into effect as well as could be desired, and the Secretary considered it necessary to circulate to all newspapers a statement setting out the names of the birds wholly protected and unprotected. The statement was published, and probably helped to remove some ignorance of the law.

MICHAEL SHARLAND, Branch Secretary.

A Count of Helmeted Honeyeaters

By R. D. LEE and C. E. BRYANT, Melbourne, Vic.

A quarterly meeting of the Union was held on November 30, 1947, when about thirty members proceeded to Upper Beaconsfield, some 25 miles east of Melbourne, to search the Cardinia Creek Valley, and, as accurately as possible in the limited time, to take a census of the Helmeted Honeyeater (*Meliphaga cassidix*).

The site selected was the junction of the Stony Creek with the Cardinia. Four groups, under selected leaders were formed, and, working from the 'camping' place, two groups, one on each side of the creek, explored the country upstream, and two others, one on each side, went downstream.

Each group was to note the number of birds seen on the outward journey only, how many seen from the places reached at half hour intervals and any relevant facts observed. In this manner about a mile and a half of the creek was combed—and that seemed to be the limit of their habitat. At least 50 individuals were seen by the several parties, with three nests, two containing eggs, and one with two young and one egg to hatch.

Group recordings were—Upstream left, $\frac{3}{4}$ mile to more open country, 10 birds; upstream right, for 300 yards, 15 birds and 1 nest; downstream left, $\frac{1}{4}$ mile, creek and hillside, 8 birds; downstream right, $\frac{3}{4}$ mile, 7 birds, none in latter part; around the 'camp,' 10 birds and 2 nests on creek.

The first nest was built in a 'manuka' (*Leptospermum scoparium*), whilst the second was situated in a musk daisy-bush (*Olearia argophylla*), both on the creek bank. The third nest (two young and one egg) was a short distance from the bank—and built in a small eucalypt. It seems evident that the habitat is confined to a limited stretch along the creek. No birds were seen on the higher ground. They were feeding mainly in the eucalypts and black wattles.

Members of no party saw personnel of any other party en route, so, considering the extreme stationary nature of the birds, there was probably no 'overlapping' and inclusion of the same birds in more than one list. Considering the thick nature of the scrub, the fact that many birds seen were noted singly and may have had mates, sitting or otherwise engaged, and the habit of the species of frequenting the very tops of tall eucalypts, it is likely that only half the birds in the valley were seen. An estimate of 100 birds is therefore considered as not excessive.

The Cardinia Creek rises in the south-eastern foothills of the Dandenong Ranges and flows south until its waters reach Westernport Bay by means of constructed channels, formerly having emptied into the Koo-wee-rup swamp, now drained, which adjoined the head of that Bay. The same foothills give rise to the Woori Yallock Creek, a tributary of the Yarra and flowing almost due north. Thus the two valleys are in the same north and south line. A 'colony' of *Meliphaga cassidix* is to be found on the Woori Yallock, but probably it forms but another part of a larger population once extending over the two areas. A census of the Woori Yallock group is a desideratum, although there the 'colony' breaks up and extends along small tributary creeks and is more scattered. An indication of the former range of the species along this north-south pair of valleys is a skin of a bird collected by the late George Shepherd near the 'mouth' of the Cardinia Creek, in country which is now entirely unsuitable for the species. The same applies to the Bass River valley, the type-locality.

On the Cardinia, the birds have been at the junction of the two creeks for many years. About ten years ago they moved, or extended, downstream two miles or more. There many observers saw them, though when one of us (Bryant) took Mr. Gregory Mathews to see the birds, none was seen, and about that time they moved upstream again.

The future of the Helmeted Honeyeater is doubtful. As far as is known this discontinuous group and another population on the Tyers River some 50 miles to the east are the only groups in existence. Sooner or later fires and clearing will destroy their habitat and, in the meantime, the Pallid Cuckoo (*Cuculus pallidus*) often lays in Helmeted Honeyeater nests, with consequent destruction of a potential brood. From that hazard alone a bird that has reached what might be called a 'species isolation' point may well find itself unable to recover.

Other birds found nesting during the outing were Leaden Flycatcher (building), White-eared Honeyeater (nest with eggs and nest with young), Brown-headed Honeyeater, Grey Thrush (2 nests with eggs and 2 with young), Yellow Robin (3 nests), Blue Wren (nest with eggs), Australian Goshawk (nest with young), Red-browed Finch and Bell-Miner (2 nests with eggs).