

The Western Warbler in Eastern New South Wales

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In late August and early September 1955 I spent a week observing birds at Hollydene, a small rural settlement in the Upper Hunter district, N.S.W. Hollydene is on the Wybong Creek which flows into the Goulburn River, which, in turn, joins the Hunter River to reach the sea at Newcastle. The locality generally lies about 100 miles to the north-west of Sydney and is on the eastern, or coastal, side of the Great Dividing Range.

I was particularly interested in the presence of the Western Warbler (*Gerygone fusca*). Three nesting pairs were located: two of their nests were built in red ash trees (*Alphitonia excelsa*) and the third was placed in an iron-bark (*Eucalyptus* sp.). Egg-laying had not commenced, though the nests, which were about half a mile apart, were almost completed when found on August 28, September 2, and September 8, respectively. A fourth pair of Western Warblers was observed near Sandy Hollow a few miles from Hollydene, but nesting was not recorded in that instance.

The call of the Western Warbler, while reminiscent of that of the White-throated species (*G. olivacea*), differs somewhat in that it is uttered more slowly and has a more 'wistful' quality; also, it is not as melodious. It was this difference in the calls of the species that first directed my attention to the presence of both birds in the one locality.

Until the following year I assumed the above records to represent the eastern limit in the range of the Western Warbler in New South Wales. However, on October 24, 1956, I observed, with K. A. Hindwood, a pair of birds building a nest in a red ash tree at Yarramin, six miles west of Scone and some thirty miles north-east of Hollydene. The type of country in both areas was similar—rather closely growing dry forest, principally of gums (*Eucalyptus*) and pines (*Callitris*), with a mixture of other trees, and with very little underscrub.

An additional record of the kind is that of a single bird seen at Queen's Creek, near Ulan, on the Upper Goulburn River, 65 miles west of Scone but still on the eastern watershed of the Great Dividing Range.

It was interesting to observe both the Western Warbler, which is usually considered an inland bird in New South Wales, and the unique Rock Warbler (*Origma rubricata*) living and nesting in the same sandstone country. Both species were recorded in all the areas mentioned in the foregoing for the Western Warbler.

It is suggested that observers in New South Wales living

in hot, dry localities on the eastern side of the Great Dividing Range should check on any *Gerygone* calls that may sound a little different from those of the more widely-distributed White-throated Warbler. Careful observation is essential because there is a similarity in their calls and both species may be seen in the same tree, as I have observed on more than one occasion.

A grey-plumaged warbler (*Gerygone*) was seen at Plump-ton, about thirty miles west of Sydney, on March 1, 1955. It uttered a call like the first few notes of the song of the White-throated Warbler as it fed unobtrusively in open forest country. It appeared to be larger than the Western Warbler and to have a stouter and longer bill. However, the matter of identification was not satisfactorily settled despite an examination of museum specimens. The bird was either a Mangrove Warbler (*G. cantator*) or a Western Warbler, and in either event was a straggler well outside its normal range.

Whether both the Western Warbler and the Mangrove Warbler are regular migrants, partial migrants, or nomads is a matter that needs to be further investigated. The subject has been discussed by A. H. Chisholm in the case of the Western Warbler (*Emu*, vol. 47, p. 203) and by K. A. Hindwood and A. R. McGill in the case of the Mangrove Warbler (*id.*, vol. 56, p. 145).

It may be noted that in the south-west of Western Australia, where the Western Warbler is common in coastal areas, some dubiety appears to prevail regarding the species' seasonal movements. Thus Serventy and Whittell (*Birds of Western Australia*) refer to its song as being heard in Perth gardens 'in spring and summer', and quote E. H. Sedgwick as saying that in the wheatbelt the melody is heard only from May to September, which may indicate that the birds leave the area in the summer months.

Stray Feathers

Dust-bathing of the White-winged Chough.—The method of dust-bathing used by the White-winged Chough (*Corcorax melanorhamphus*) and noted by J. Douglas Gibson (*Emu*, vol. 54, p. 279), is, I believe, quite regular. I have frequently seen Choughs apparently 'anting', but on examination of the ground have been unable to find any ants. The last occasion was on April 10, 1957, at Berrigan, New South Wales.

A party of eighteen Choughs was feeding at the edge of a recently-ploughed paddock. The turning of the tractor at the perimeter of the paddock had left a strip of very compact earth, some of which had crumbled into fine dust. Two of the Choughs started picking up beak-fulls of this dust and placing it amongst their feathers exactly as described by