

Nest-Lining of the Yellow-winged Honeyeater

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While nest-construction of a particular bird species may often vary according to the locality (and consequently the type of nest-building material available), the *selection* of material for lining of the nest is usually far less variable. The following notes, however, indicate a different choice of lining material between two colonies of the same species, resident in almost identical habitats.

Within the inner Metropolitan area of Sydney there are still two large colonies of the Yellow-winged Honeyeater (*Meliornis novae-hollandiae*) resident in surviving patches of coastal heathland, both isolated by heavily built-up areas. These localities are North Head and the headland behind Long Bay Rifle Range. Both are elevated and covered with somewhat swampy, sandstone heathland. Both appear to carry identical vegetation—chiefly a dense growth of *Banksia ericifolia*, *Leptospermum*, and dwarf *Casuarina*, with a few other species of typical Hawkesbury sandstone flora.

During a period of 15 years' observation in the Long Bay area I have sighted possibly over 100 nests of the species, and have detailed notes on 27 of these. In every case the nests have been lined with *red* plant down; but at North Head, some seven miles away, of 12 nests sighted in 1958-60, all were lined with *white* plant down and in one case, also, a quantity of white, decayed newspaper. The explanation for this is not very obvious. Red plant down is readily available in both areas from *Banksia* and *Casuarina* bushes; white plant down is also available, while artificial white fibres, in the form of kapok and paper, are available in the rubbish which litters both areas. The time of the year does not seem to have any effect, as I have recorded the breeding of the Long Bay birds in every month of the year, and that of the North Head birds from April to November. Also, old *Banksia* cones, apparently the main source of supply of the red plant down, are available in both places all the year round.

Why do the two groups prefer different-coloured nest-linings? Isolation can hardly be the answer, as the species tends to wander into suburban parks and gardens when not breeding, and many of the birds probably have to move elsewhere after the scrub fires that periodically sweep both areas. This should bring them into contact with the birds of the sandstone heaths north and south of Sydney, which, so far as I have observed, prefer the red plant down.