

## The Coastal Habitat of the Striped Honeyeater (*Plectorhyncha lanceolata*)

By J. F. H. Gogerley, R.A.O.U., "Ellerslie," Wallis Lakes, N.S.W.

While looking at some collections of eggs at Forster, I saw clutches of eggs which the boys said were the eggs of a bird they called the Summer Bird. Not being able to place the species, I showed the eggs to Mr. J. H. Bettington, of "Terragong," Merriwa, but he was also unable to give them a name. We were all puzzled about the bird until this spring, when Mr. S. W. Jackson, R.A.O.U., was on a visit to Ellerslie. I showed him the eggs, and he said they were the eggs of the Striped or Lanceolated Honeyeater, though the eggs were more heavily coloured than those of the inland bird in its proper habitat. How he was able to place the bird was owing to the fact of seeing these birds at Iluka, at the mouth of the Clarence River, twenty years ago, which speaks well for the memory of Mr. Jackson.

Mr. Jackson says that Iluka and Forster were the only places that he had ever seen these birds on the coast, while on his travels, which extend over a wide area of Australia.

It is a remarkable fact for this bird to leave its proper habitat, so far inland, to come to the coast in two places, *i.e.*, Iluka and Forster, which are a good distance one from the other.

The bird has evidently been driven to the coast in these isolated instances by drought, and finding food and conditions to suit, it has made its home in these small areas. The most remarkable fact is that the bird only frequents a small part of the district, the extent of its habitat being bounded by Cape Hawke on the south, and the Manning River on the north, an area which would be about twenty miles long by eight miles wide. The birds are more numerous about Forster, but are very thinly distributed over the other parts of the district.

Mr. Jackson described the nest as being made of wool and Emu feathers on the Mooney River, where he saw the bird in its proper habitat. The nest of the Forster bird is built of very fine grass and rootlets, woven together with spiders' webs and native cotton. It is always placed on the drooping branches of the paper-bark trees, making it a very hard nest to get.

The photograph of the nest with this article was kindly lent by Mr. Jackson, who is noted for his wonderful work in ornithological photography. I am also indebted to Mr. Jackson for his note as to this bird being at Iluka.

Doubtless, as the coastal conditions have made such a change in the markings of the eggs, there will most likely be a slight change in the plumage, and I intend to secure a skin to see if there is any marked difference or not.



Nest of the Striped Lincovaster (*Streptopelia lineolata*).

Photo. by Sir W. Jackson, I.C.A.C.I.

Both Mr. Bettington and Mr. Jackson say that the differences in the markings of the eggs are very strong. Personally, the inland bird is unknown to me.

The fact of the bird being called the Summer Bird around Forster is owing, no doubt, to its being noticed only during the breeding season when the local boys are collecting eggs.

The strangest point about the bird's local habitat is the line of demarcation on the south. Draw a line from the Cape Hawke Mountain to the lake, and there are no birds to be seen on the southern side of the line or on Cape Hawke itself. There is none of these Honeyeaters on Wallis Island, although this is the same class of country as that around Forster, where the *Plectorhyncha* makes its home. It would be very interesting to discover what makes these birds keep to this small area. It is the food, no doubt, but what kind of food, when apparently all the country for ten miles round has just the same trees and flowers. It remains to be seen if the plumage of the bird has changed as much as the egg-markings.

In that fine article by Capt. S. A. White, on his last trip across Australia,\* he mentions seeing *Plectorhyncha lanceolata* between Longreach and Bourke. This line of country is a long way from the coast of New South Wales, and how the few birds came here and bred up the small colony is a mystery.

This visit of the R.A.O.U. and the fine lecture by Captain S. A. White on Bird Economics during the Camp-out at "Ellerslie," in 1921, are having very marked effects in stopping egg-destruction and helping to preserve the birds of the district. The visit of the R.A.O.U. aroused an interest in bird life that will set the young people on the right road to the study of ornithology, and teach them to know their birds.

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