

## Some More Birds of the Heath Country

By G. R. GANNON, R.A.O.U., Artarmon, N.S.W.

Good heath-lands are fairly numerous in the vicinity of Sydney, but in many instances they are separated by miles of country which, while in general containing many plant representatives of the heath, is but slightly clothed in those flowering plants beloved by the Honeyeaters. On the heaths the main flowering plants attractive to the Honeyeaters are the *Banksias* (five or six species), *Grevillea pumicea*, *Lambertia formosa*, *Callistemon* (two species), and the grass tree (*Xanthorrhœa*); the last-named plant is unfortunately getting somewhat rare owing to the commercial value which is placed on the resin that it contains. There are other flowering plants also attractive to Honeyeaters, but they are of minor importance. One or more of these plants may predominate on one heath, and as the various species do not all flower at the same time, the Honeyeaters become more or less nomadic.

Mr. A. J. Elliott, R.A.O.U., a visitor to Sydney, expressed surprise in the April *Emu* (Vol. XXXII, Part 4, pp. 273-275) at the wealth of bird life to be seen, during the spring, on one of these heath areas, and Mr. N. Chaffer, R.A.O.U., in the same issue (pp. 270-273) dealt with the nesting habits of one species of Honeyeater, namely, the White-eared (*Meliphaga leucotis*), and incidentally listed the Honeyeaters that are more or less restricted to the heath.

During the autumn and winter months, besides the more or less local nomadic movement of the heath-restricted Honeyeaters, there is a heavy influx of Honeyeaters from the open forests, the wooded hillsides, and the mountains west of Sydney.

One particular heath with which I am well acquainted adjoins the National Park at Kuringai-Chase. It is shaped something like half a saucer, the lower edge of the saucer being represented by a well-timbered creek. The depression receives soakage from the sandstone ridges above, and the conditions are just right for the foundation of a good heath. The plant growth is on an average perhaps five feet high, so it is possible, by selecting a slightly elevated position, to look down on the birds and watch their ways. It appears to be on the track of a partial migratory movement of some species of Honeyeaters entering Kuringai-Chase, and also French's Forest, and I have found it a most useful observation centre.

The following notes from my diary are selected from this and previous years' observations, and they may be regarded as being composite. If enlarged they would read something after the following manner:—

April.—The *Banksias* are now coming into bloom and a number of *Lambertia formosa* are in flower also. A search is made to see what the heath contains. We have not gone far when a Heath-Wren (*Hylacola pyrrhopygia*) is heard mimicking a number of birds. I note down a few of them:—Kookaburra, "Peewee," Tawny-crowned Honeyeater, Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike, and the Willie Wagtail. This is interesting; I wonder if the Heath-Wren mimics throughout the year? I note the date, April 7. The last time I heard one of these birds mimicking was in October. I then heard a Willie Wagtail calling just over the ridge, and in searching for it found instead a Heath-Wren. A Painted Quail (*Turnix varia*) rises with a "whirr" of wings, but it is only occasionally that I see one here.

A number of Dusky Wood-Swallows (*Artamus cyanopterus*) are perched on the stunted eucalypts that grow on the heath; once when following up a delightful little twittering song I found that it proceeded from one of these birds. It was to me a new discovery. These birds appear here about the same time every year. This year (1933) they disappeared in the first week of May. The heath is not yet saturated with bird life although several visitors have arrived in small numbers.

I return again, several times, until on May 7 I note the Brush Wattle-birds in one or two small flocks. A few remain to feed on the *Banksia ericifolia*, the others pass over to the south-east. On May 14 a flock of at least one hundred White-naped Honeyeaters, or "Blackcaps", as we call them, passed over; other smaller flocks followed, and a number remained. It is the passing of the Regent Honeyeaters that I like most to see, but this year I have, up to date, been disappointed in that respect, for they should have appeared before now, so I will have to refer back to my notes of a previous year, May, 1932.—The heath is alive with Honeyeaters, the Yellow-faced being the most plentiful. From my cathedral rock I look down on a joyous company, watch their bickerings and playful chasing of one another, and listen to their calls and songs. Every now and then the pure, fluted, deliberated notes of the Tawny-crowned Honeyeater reach me, through the clear and frosty air; even the harsh calls of the Brush Wattle-bird becomes music in this setting. I note a few Regent Honeyeaters about, and then a long thin line of them arrives from over the distant hills. They are showy birds and add colour to the scene; they pause awhile for refreshments, and then fifty or more leisurely pass on over the ridge south-eastwards to some more distant and perhaps better heath. Some day I hope to discover where it is. I guess, roughly, that the area of land on which all these Honeyeaters are gathered is one hundred acres, and that it contains one thousand birds, and

that about half of them occupy one-tenth of that area. This is the high tide of bird life on the heath. In a few weeks' time most of them will have departed.

Below is a list of the Honeyeaters that may be seen on the heath at this time of the year:—White-naped (*Melithreptus lunatus*), Brown-headed (*M. brevirostris*), Eastern Spinebill (*Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris*), Tawny-crowned (*Gliciphila melanops*), Regent (*Zanthomiza phrygia*), Fuscous (*Meliphaga fusca*), Yellow-faced (*M. chrysops*), White-eared (*M. leucotis*), Yellow-tufted (*M. melanops*), Yellow-winged (*Meliornis novæ-hollandiæ*), White-cheeked (*M. niger*), Little Wattle-bird (*Anthochæra chrysoptera*), Red Wattle-bird (*A. carunculata*).

On one occasion I recorded the Crescent Honeyeater (*Phylidonyris pyrrhoptera*).

The call notes of the Lewin Honeyeater (*Meliphaga lewinii*) may be heard coming from the creek below, but I have never actually seen this bird on the heath. The creek also harbours the Lyrebird (*Menura novæ-hollandiæ*), the Whipbird (*Psophodes olivaceus*), and the Rock Warbler (*Origma rubricata*), besides many other birds which at times may be seen on portions of the heath, but they belong more truly to the tree-fringed creek. On the more swampy heaths the Emu-Wren (*Stipiturus malachurus*) may be found, and sometimes the Pheasant-Coucal (*Centropus phasianinus*).

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