



# birds

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## BIRDS THAT SEEK NESTING MATERIAL FROM LIVING MAMMALS

The recent note in BIRDS (vol.2,no.2,September,1967,p.20) about a White-eared Honeyeater that sought nesting material from the head of Mrs. Barbara Brown prompted me to refer to my records of honeyeaters known to practice this strange habit.

In some instances the nesting material may be taken from the body of a dead animal lying in the bush, or from a pelt hung over a fence to dry. At times a nesting honeyeater will remove fibres from a blanket hanging on a clothes line, or strands from a hempen rope or, perhaps, fibres from an unwanted mattress thoughtlessly thrown into the bush. Mostly, though, the birds seek hair and fur from living animals, hair from man, or wool from the clothes he is wearing.

When kangaroos, wallabies, koalas and possums are present in a locality a plentiful supply of nesting material is readily available to the birds. However, in areas where settlement and other

human activities have reduced the numbers of native mammals man, and domestic and feral beasts such as horses, cows, pigs, goats, dogs and deer, may be placed under tribute by questing honeyeaters of several species.

The habit is particularly strong in the White-eared Honeyeater, being practiced only by the female of that species. Some amusing incidents are known of these birds fearlessly attempting to remove hair from human heads (it should be emphasized that the birds are honeyeaters, not woodpeckers, and that they are seeking nesting material) or of their efforts to pull wool from jumpers or coats and, in at least one instance, strands from the socks of a naturalist (Roscoe Gannon) lazing in a quiet spot. Dogs accompanying their masters on bush rambles have been known to become uneasy and even alarmed when the honeyeaters attempt to perch on their heads or backs.

The Black-chinned Honeyeater is especially partial to white hair and will take it from a white patch on a horse, a cow, or a goat, even if it means clinging upside down to the belly of one of these animals. A bird of this species, in its search for fur, is said to have pestered a partly white cat so much that puss "often cried out with rage". Of course the cat could have solved its problem by eating the bird.

It is of interest to note that the Tufted Titmouse (*Parus bicolor*) of North America is not content with picking hair or fur from dead animals, but is bold enough to collect the needed nesting material from living animals including squirrels, woodchucks and man himself.

The following list deals with the five species of Australian honeyeaters known by me to collect nesting material from living mammals.

White-naped Honeyeater; from Koala, horse, cow.

Brown-headed Honeyeater; from horse, cow, possum (in a hollow limb), man (and his clothes).

Fuscous Honeyeater; from horse, cow.

Black-chinned Honeyeater; from horse, cow, goat, cat.

White-eared Honeyeater; from man (and his clothes), dog, cow, horse, wallaby, goat, pig, koala, introduced deer.

REPORT OF FIELD-DAY TO PITT TOWN LAGOON & SCHEYVILLE

Members arrived at Pitt Town Lagoon on Sunday Morning, Sept. 24th, for the field-day led by Mr. E. Hoskin.

Twenty-six species of birds were noted on the Lagoon: White and Straw-necked Ibis were in considerable numbers, but only two Glossy Ibis were seen. Two Jacanas and four Blue-winged Shovel-lers were also observed.

A Marsh Crake was noted by David Sawyer who waded into the lagoon, where he found three Little Grebes' nests and several White-headed Stilts' nests - all nests contained eggs.

Other species recorded at Pitt Town were Royal and Yellow-billed Spoonbills, White-fronted and Pacific Herons, White Egret, Spur-winged Plover, Black Duck, Black Swan, Pelican and Pipit. Several Pelicans gave a fine display of formation flying.

A faded yellow neck-band from a Black Swan was found by Mr. Scotchmer. The band will be sent to the Bird Banders' Ass'n. A Swan with a yellow neck-band was also seen.

At mid-day the party moved to Scheyville seeing on route the Rufous Whistler, White-throated Warbler, Pallid Cuckoo, Little Thornbill and the Black-chinned Honeyeater. At Scheyville 29 species were observed, including the Chough, Speckled Warbler, Yellow-tailed Thornbill, Golden-bronze Cuckoo and the Jacky Winter.

A most enjoyable and interesting day was had by all and our sincere thanks are expressed to our Leader, Mr. E. Hoskin.

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FIELD-DAY TO TOONGABBIE CREEK AND QUARRY CREEK RESERVE 8.10.67

Twenty-five members attended the excursion led by Athol Cole-mane. Fifty species were recorded, including the Pallid, Golden-bronze, Narrow-billed Bronze and Fan-tailed Cuckoos. A nesting Brown Warbler was examined with interest.

At the Reserve and Scout's Camp a Yellow Robin was nesting and the White-throated Warbler both heard and seen. Birds seen at the Quarry were Reed Warblers and Rufous Whistlers, both in good voice, the Spotted Pardalote and a Sacred Kingfisher breed-ing in a termites' cluster.

A list of the birds of the area, prepared by Mr. Colemane,

was much appreciated by members. The list contained 95 species. Thank you Mr. Coleman for a pleasant and interesting outing.

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### FIELD EXCURSIONS

Saturday, November 19, 1967. Rooty Hill. Leader Mr. E. Wood.

The Shale area to the west of Sydney is very interesting bird country, and Mr. Wood is expected to have a good variety of nests ready for members to inspect.

Meet at 10 a.m. on the Richmond Road, 6 tenths of a mile west of Rooty Hill Road (Gregory's map H.5 C). The party will probably move to another locality at lunch time.

Saturday, December 9, 1967. Dharug National Park, Leader Mr. G. Dibley.

Dharug is one of our most recent National Parks, with some magnificent scenery and fine rain-forest patches. Meet at 10 a.m. at the bridge over Mangrove Creek, which can be reached either by way of Wisemans Ferry and Spencer, or from the Pacific Highway through Galga, Central Mangrove and Mangrove Mountain. From the bridge the party will move a few miles up Mangrove Creek on the western side, past Screech Owl Creek.

If any member feels that one day is not long enough, arrangements can be made to camp on the Saturday night. Please contact Mr. Dibley first; Telephone No. 57-6298.

Public Transport is not available to either the above areas. Peter Roberts will try and help those without cars. His Telephone No. is 47-9240.

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### MIMICRY BY A MISTLETOE-BIRD

On October 4 at Mount Kuring-gai I watched a male Mistletoe-bird perched on a vertical stem one foot from the ground, imitating the calls of at least 10 species of birds; Spotted Pardalote, Rufous Whistler, Wagtail, Grey Fantail, Brown-headed and White-checked Honeyeaters, Bul-Bul, Heath Wren, and White-throated Tree-Creeper. The calls were uttered at regular intervals of about one second with a slight pause between (unlike most mimics, which manage to weave them together into a fluent song), and were interspersed with his own calls. With each call he turned his head alternately from right to left, and the whole performance had a rather mechanical air about it. PETER ROBERTS, Mt. Kuring-gai.