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And thus ended a most enjoyable banding tour of the islands. We arrived back for lunch about 1.30 p.m., sun-burned, tired, very hungry and smelling like young pelicans. The rest of the week-end was spent fishing and cray-fishing with marked success. On the Sunday three skuas (species?) were seen harrassing Crested Terns as they fished for small sardine-type fishes. This is the first time I have been skuas near Cape Portland.

AUTUMN BANDING OF MIGRATING YELLOW-FACED HONEYEATERS

M. Murn, Canberra. A.C.T.

My field experiences during April 6th and 7th, 1963, confirm much of what Steve Wilson (1963) had to say on flight patterns and behaviour of migrating honeyeaters.

It is considered that the type of country had much to do with the following incident and that if somewhat similar terrain could be found elsewhere in the path of migrating honeyeaters, netting should be possible there.

Through much of the A.C.T. the Murrumbidgee runs in a deep valley through open rolling grazing country. A few isolated gums remain in the open country but along the river there are good sized gums and she oaks with a low scrub of dwarf wattles, grevilleas and teatrees.

The site of this incident was Pine Island, on the Murrumbidgee south of Canberra, and at the netting site a group of tall trees stands at one end while the next tall trees are 200 yards upstream. Here the river has a fairly high sandy bank about 50 yards wide which rises then into a steep bare hill. This flat and the base of the hill are scrubby with patches of grass.

On the morning of April 6th, accompanied by my wife, son and daughter, I was mist-netting in this area but results were poor and spirits took a real dive as flock after flock of Yellow-faced Honeyeaters (Meliphaga chrysops) passed overhead well clear of the nets. It was noticed however that the birds flew low along the sandy river bank, that is over the scrub and grass between the tall trees at each end of the netting area, and that

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some were flying low enough to net. To catch these, several nets were shifted into a line across the path of the migrating birds. The nets were virtually fully exposed. The move met with reasonable success and some 70 birds were banded.

It was particularly interesting to note that the flocks were moving through the tall trees along the river bank and some birds in each flock left the flock to rest before flying over the area without trees. They then seemed to join up with the next flock to pass through. The "flight path" was a little south of west to east although it is admitted that this direction could have changed around the next bend in the river, and the calls uttered by the birds were the "chip chip" described by Steve Wilson.

Some 28 flocks were counted and several flocks took up to a minute to pass through in a straggling formation. It is estimated that altogether approximately 10,000 to 12,000 birds passed through the area, and judging on banding figures, each flock contained about 5% White-naped Honeyeaters (Melith-reptus lunatus). The birds first appeared around 7.30 a.m. and movement stopped completely at about 11.30 a.m. Before the flocks arrived no Yellow-faced Honeyeaters were netted or even heard in the area.

That night I pondered on how to band more of these birds and a simple scheme occurred to me which in practice proved very effective, even with birds flying 50 feet or more above the ground.

Accompanied by my son, I went to the same area early the next morning and placed my 7 nets in a "fish-trap" pattern, i.e. flanking nets converging on a 60 ft. net on 10 ft. poles facing the expected direction the birds would come from. However, the birds did not appear until 9.10 a.m. The first flocks were small and flying very high and were allowed to pass through. When the first big flock came through and the birds had committed themselves to the flight over the open area of 200 yards between the tall trees, a stick was hurled high in the air in their general direction. The result was fantastic. At the sight of the stick spinning through the air and the "whooshing" noise it made, or a combination of both, every bird in the flock dived for cover in the low scrub, or if caught over a grassy area flew very close to the ground. This method was used three or four times and each time we obtained good catches in the nets. With only two in the team, however, we had to stop and concentrate on getting the birds out of the nets and many flocks were allowed to pass. A further sixty-six birds were banded.

All this information was passed onto Steve Wilson and on

the following week-end, on one day, his experienced team banded 300 birds.

Four weeks later, after seeing large flocks of White-naped Honeyeaters in the ranges east of Pine Island, I decided to visit the area again to see if these birds were migrating along the same line as the Yellow-faced Honeyeaters and happily they were doing just that. It was obvious, however, that I should have been there before, because the flocks were less numerous and not as large as the Yellow-faced Honeyeater migration but gave every indication of having been on the same magnitude.

Throwing a stick into the air is a wonderful way to halt a flock of these birds and it can be expected that during March to early May of next year large numbers of these birds will be banded by the joint efforts of local banders.

Reference: Wilson, S.J., 1963, "Mist netting migrating Yellow-faced Honeyeaters". The Bird Bander, Vol. 1, No.4.

FURTHER NOTES ON AUTUMN MIGRATION OF HONEYEATERS.

S.J.Wilson, Canberra.

Max Murn's story after his banding at Pine Island was rather incredible, but we decided to try that area on the next Saturday (April 13th) after his visit. Two things were difficult to credit, firstly that the birds travelled up river at a time when the general migration line was north-east and secondly that the nets should contrary to all our experiences, be placed in the open. With a rather half-hearted frame of mind we set our nets in the scrub over the 200 yard space between the tall trees and waited. We were ready by 6 a.m.; 7 a.m. came, then 8 a.m., and still no birds and by this time the Murn name was mud. By 9 a.m. we were all but ready to pack up and attention was waning. There had been no sign of birds to this time, least of all honeyeaters.

Suddenly, at 9.5 a.m. a dense flock of at least 1,000 birds burst out of the trees at the western end. We were unprepared and had to run to our allotted "throwing stations". A few moments convinced us that Max was right about the net positions so a few were belatedly placed as he suggested - right in the open.

Flocks continued to come through for two hours with the five team members working furiously. After hurling sticks for an hour all were anxious to take birds out, record or band - but throw? No! There were a lot of stiff arms.

Our catch of 300 included 246 Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, 39 White-naped Honeyeaters and one Fuscous Honey-eater (Meliphaga fusca). Others taken that morning included the Eastern Spinebill (Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris) and the White-eared Honeyeater (M.leucotis) both of which appeared to be moving through the area but not with the flocks.

The following morning we went back to Pine Island with a team of 15 and had the nets in perfect position by 7 a.m. Sticks were piled in strategic positions and we settled down to wait. 8 a.m. went and at 9 a.m. we were really on our toes. By 10 a.m. we were impatient and by 11 a.m. spirits were low. We pulled down at noon without having seen a migrant! Total catch 10!

The following observations regarding the migrant flocks may be of interest:

- (a) The birds reacted to anything thrown high - we used all sorts of sticks and stones.
- (b) More than one missile was necessary to divert a big flock.
- (c) The important thing appeared to be to throw as high as possible - hence the volunteers for the sedentary work after a period of throwing.
- (d) There is absolutely no danger to the birds. They dive away from the missile which goes nowhere near them finally. There was more danger to other operators and to the nets.
- (e) Once brought down, the flocks flew low through and over the scrub. We threw from positions about thirty yards into the treeless area and nets 150 yards further on took large numbers of birds.
- (f) Flocks left to themselves flew high over all nets and the scrub, except for the very odd individual.
- (g) While the direction of flight (south of the west to east line) is difficult to understand, there is little doubt that the birds follow the river for only a few miles here and turn away to a general north-east direction as the river turns south. Their normal direction through the A.C.T. is north-east and flights in this direction have been observed on many occasions during this, and other, seasons.
- (h) Max's notes regarding flocks of White-naped Honeyeaters in early May confirm earlier observations.