

## Migration of Yellow-faced Honeyeaters

Since 1958 several local R.A.O.U. members have joined with me in gathering further field observations in our area on the problem of the migration of Yellow-faced Honeyeaters (*Meliphaga chrysops*) (Robertson, 1958).

Miss Ella Pratt in northern New South Wales, at the family farm at Reserve Creek (Army reference one mile map, Murwillumbah, 685822) has been regularly recording all bird movements observed, feed tree flowerings, etc. This spot is 4½ miles from the coast and 250 feet above sea level, on one of several steep eucalypt-covered ridges, surrounded by low flood plain which is cultivated and grazed.

Noel Jack has made periodic visits to the Taylor Ranges and Mount Cootha areas north and west of Brisbane, noting the movements and population changes there of the Yellow-faced Honeyeaters.

Others are recording their observations as opportunity offers and supplying them to me for a general summary. It is hoped that recently commenced regular population observations north of Brisbane will extend the range of information in this vital direction. Such surveys regularly done can do much to supply the data necessary to elucidate problems such as this migration one.

Consideration of the information so gleaned in these six years has suggested some general trends as being applicable to S.E. Queensland and adjacent areas of New South Wales. These are subject to revision as the data so far gathered by no means covers the picture. The summary below is put forward by me in appreciation of the joint effort and as a tentative basis for further observations to expand, confirm or disprove its items. These items represent perhaps the terminal behaviour pattern and bear a general similarity to those of Hindwood (1956) for the areas further south where the migration is still in full flow.

It appears that:

(1) The northward flights occur generally during the latter half of April and May in bright weather, usually with a noticeable change of season to crisp, clear south-westerly weather. Overcast conditions check noticeable movements.

(2) These migratory flights typically comprise successive groups of birds, all of which show

a marked constancy of direction, both as to individuals and groups. The persistent cheeping of the flying birds attracts attention to the flights. This cheeping in no way resembles the familiar "chick-up" call.

(3) From about 7 a.m. to early afternoon is the most favoured time for migration flights. The height is generally clear above the tree tops.

(4) Frequently whole groups, or just odd birds, drop into the head of a prominent tree and rest a while or even feed, before joining some subsequent passing group to continue the northern flight. Despite this, there is an ever present impression of urgency.

(5) Whilst in the southern half of Australia the flights are referred to (Hindwood, 1956; Hobbs, 1958) as being of masses of birds and compact, in our area the movement fans out to thin streams over a broad front with progressive dispersal in the eastern portions of northern N.S.W. and southern Queensland to at least the Glasshouse Mountains. Efforts to detect such movements north of these mountains have so far been unsuccessful.

(6) Sites which show big north-bound flights in some years show little or no movement in other years. For example, observers on or near the coast in 1963 recorded both an unusually heavy migration — over 3,000 birds passing one Moreton Bay site one morning — and later, large numbers of nomadic winter flocks, whilst in 1964 the birds were in such small numbers as to be barely noticeable.

(7) The northern movement is generally along the coast and near ranges. Lack of inland observers may give this impression erroneously.

(8) The northern and southern limits of the wintering range vary appreciably from year to year. The western extent is obscure, but includes both slopes of the Great Dividing Range. Marginal information is meagre.

(9) Sections of the large area of country at present thought to receive the influx of wintering birds from the south carry a year round population of Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, many of which breed in that area.

(10) The timing and extent of the flowering of native trees, particularly the Blackbutts and other eucalypts, may prove to be an important factor influencing both the migration date and the winter range.

(11) In the winter range, Yellow-faced Honeyeaters favour the tall trees and behave both as generally dispersed residents and nomad flocks. Nomadic flights often show exploratory tendencies and may be towards any point of the compass. They are generally by single flocks, though a straggling flock can give a brief impression of groups maintaining direction constancy. However, the lack of further passage groups soon discounts the suggestion of migration.

(12) Noisy Friar Birds (*Philemon corniculatus*), and Scarlet Honeyeaters (*Myzomela sanguinolenta*) often share the movement, but the latter generally start earlier, even in March.

(13) Little is known of the south-bound spring flights in July and August, but these seem to be rather inland than coastal.

Mass banding of Yellow-faced Honeyeaters as they migrate northwards through the Canberra area has been carried out by S. J. Wilson and others. (Wilson, 1962, 1963; Murn, 1963; for further note on technique, see D'Ombra, 1964.). Their work provides the opportunity

for observers and banders north of Canberra, particularly in our area, to follow this up and make recoveries which would furnish some much needed positive evidence. No doubt the southern banders would be pleased to return the compliment and look out for our bandings of this species, though to date, alas, these are but a few.

#### References

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—J. S. Robertson, *Wellington Point, Moreton Bay, Queensland.*

## A note on the Yellow-Tipped Pardalote

A pleasing feature of mist-netting and banding is the occasional discovery of some bird considered not present in an area or, alternately, not having been previously observed there. This was the case recently when Yellow-tipped Pardalotes (*Pardalotus striatus*) were banded at Bendigo.

So far, the only area in which I have netted it is along a small water-course running out of Yellow Gum — Grey Box country on the fringe of the Whipstick Mallee, six miles north of Bendigo. This site is cleared of timber for 100 yards or so on either side of the gully, which carries water only after heavy rain.

In four months from April to July, 1963, I banded 28 of this species. Although banding is still being carried out, no more have been mist-netted there since.

The wing pattern of this species is very regular, this regularity not being recorded for *P. ornatus* or *P. substriatus*, both of which are plentiful in the area. For the purpose of identification, Bendigo banders have adopted the

practice of recording the pattern of the wing stripe and wing tip of all Striped-crowned Pardalotes. By spreading the wing, the number of white stripes on the flight feathers are easily counted and also the number and colour of spots on the tip.

Three of the 28 birds had six feathers comprising the yellow spot, the remainder having seven. The white edging on the primary feathers was even more uniform. While all birds had the usual faint white edging on the first primary and none on the second, in all cases but one, the third primary was edged white. Only one of the 28 birds had the fourth feather very finely edged, thus making a regular pattern of narrow white wing stripe.

Two Yellow-tipped Pardalotes were banded during a combined campout of Victorian banders in the You Yang Mountains in the Geelong-Werribee district.

It would be interesting to know if other banders have had any success in ringing this species.

—John C. Ipsen, 15 Smith St., Bendigo, Vic.