CORELLA
Journal of the Australian Bird Study Association

Volume 27 Number 1 March 2003

Corella, 2003, 27(1): 1–12

THE IMPORTANCE OF EUCALYPT NECTAR IN THE DIET OF LARGE HONEYEATERS

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Received. 7 March 2000

In a study comparing the densities of Noisy Friarbirds *Philemon corniculatus*, Red Wattlebirds *Anthochaera carunculata* and flowering eucalypts, between 1992 and 1996 in central eastern New South Wales, the flowering of trees was found to be a very highly significant explanatory variable accounting for changes in honeyeater numbers at both regional and local scales. Correlations between counts of honeyeaters and flowering trees and the proportion of time spent in aggression and foraging at flowering trees were significant. At sites on the western slopes, flowering trees are more significant in determining the density of these two honeyeaters than sites on the coast and tablelands. While eucalypt nectar is important at some sites and for some seasons, it is suggested that other factors, such as patch size and other foods, may determine the whereabouts of these two honeyeaters. The correlations suggest that both honeyeaters seek higher yielding flowering patches, and that defence of nectar sources is more worthwhile when resources are more concentrated and localized. This study indicates that remnant forests on the western slopes provide important foraging habitat in winter and spring, particularly for *P. corniculatus*