

BREEDING OF RAINBOW BEE-EATERS IN SOUTHERN VICTORIA

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Rainbow Bee-eaters *Merops ornatus* studied over a six-year period in southern Victoria excavated nesting burrows in creek banks and nearby flat or sloping terrain; sites, but not burrows, were commonly used in more than one season. Nesting dispersion varied from solitary to loosely clustered. Egg-laying commenced in early November and hatching and fledging peaked in December and January, respectively. Mean clutch size was 4.5 and the incubation and nestling periods averaged 25 and 28 days, respectively. Mean egg success was 40 per cent. Nesting mortality was mainly due to hatching failure, heavy precipitation and disease or malnutrition; only 12 per cent was caused by predators, mainly the exotic Red Fox. The results are compared with the limited breeding data available for other locations and bee-eater species.