

The White-fronted Honeyeater in North Western Queensland

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Another case is presented of a species revealed in an area as a result of mist netting. The previous scarcity of observers may well have contributed to lack of observations in the past, but more recently, of eight White-fronted Honeyeaters (*Gliciphila albifrons*) caught during the last three years, only one was sighted outside a mist net.

A specimen of the White-fronted Honeyeater was collected at Richmond in 1904 (Gannon 1962). This appears to be the only published record of the species from North Western Queensland. Lacking other records, Gannon appears to have accepted this record as a vagrant and in his distribution map (*Emu*, 62:151), indicated that normal distribution does not extend east of Barrow Creek and Alice Springs in Central Australia and north of Eromanga in Western Queensland. However, the capture of eight White-fronted Honeyeaters by the Mount Isa banding group in the Mount Isa district during the last three years indicates that this species is probably a frequent and possibly a regular visitor to North Western Queensland.

Details of the birds captured and banded.

Band No.	Age	Date	Location
021-01224	A	20.9.64	Spring Creek, 12 miles E.N.E. of Mount Isa
021-01342	A	3.10.64	Ditto
021-01365	A	4.10.64	Ditto
021-01376	A	4.10.64	Ditto
021-02596	A	21.2.65	Mount Isa Town
021-35501	A	21.11.65	East Leichhardt River, 25 miles east of Mount Isa
021-08962	A	28.11.65	Ditto
021-81912	A	28.1.67	Leichhardt River, 4 miles south of Mount Isa

The period 1963 to mid 1966 was extremely dry throughout Central Australia and South Western Queensland. Because of this, the 1964-1965 records were thought to be the results of exceptional drought-induced movements by vagrants into North Western Queensland. Conditions since mid 1966 have, however, changed

completely. Central Australia has had one of the best seasons ever recorded and even South Western Queensland received some relief rain. The Mount Isa district on the other hand had, up until the middle of February, a relatively poor season. The appearance of White-fronted Honeyeaters in the district under these circumstances can hardly be explained by drought-induced vagrant movement.

Though this experience covers only one year when seasonal conditions have been good within the normally accepted range of the species, it does suggest that the species could be a frequent visitor to North Western Queensland. The fact that all birds have been caught during the spring-summer period suggests also that these visits could conform to a regular, almost, migratory pattern. This pattern can possibly be explained by the concentration of the blossoming of the more important food trees during this period. These include the Bloodwood (*Eucalyptus terminalis*) August to October, the River Red Gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) October to December, the Bat-winged Coral Tree (*Erythrina vespertilio*) November and December and the Tristania (*Tristania grandiflora*) September to February. It is probably pertinent that, with the exception of one bird (021-02596), caught in the town of Mount Isa, all birds were caught in areas where the Tristania was in bloom.

The main arguments against a hypothesis of regular spring summer visitation of this species to North Western Queensland is the absence of records prior to 1964.

There are, however, two factors that might well explain this lack of earlier records. The first was the lack of observers in the area in the past. The second is the ability of the species to move through the area without being seen.

While a few ornithologists and observers visited the area in the 1920's and 1930's John Liddy, 1954-1958, was probably the only experienced ornithologist and observer to reside in the Mount Isa district prior to the present period of banding activity. He was probably also the only one who had the opportunity to carry out any intensive study of the local avifauna during the summer months. Unfortunately, during his stay in Mount Isa, banding was not permitted and he did not have the advantage of the use of mist nets.

The ability of White-fronted Honeyeaters to pass unnoticed is illustrated by the fact that the only one seen, other than in the mist nets, was 021-02596 which was caught in town. This ability is rather difficult to explain because in open areas such as home gardens, the species is quite

conspicuous. The only explanation which can be offered at present is that travelling in small numbers and keeping to the rather dense, dark foliated Tristania, their dark plumage with diffused white markings, camouflages them to some extent.

Because of the short period of experience to date, the hypothesis presented is tentative only. It is hoped that future work in this area can firmly establish the status of this species.

Reference

Gannon, G. R. (1962), 'Distribution of the Australian Honeyeaters', *Emu*, 62: 145-166.

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Flocking Behaviour Of Striated And Brown Thornbills

S. J. Wilson (1965) in *The Aust. Bird Bander*, vol. 3, no. 3 p. 46, recorded the banding of a group of five Striated Thornbills (*Acanthiza lineata*) and their retrap together two years later.

Comparison with three years' banding of this species at The Gurdies on the eastern shore of Westernport Bay, Victoria, is given.

Nets are erected in the vicinity of a water-hole at the junction of dry sclerophyll forest and regenerating melaleuca scrub on grassland. Sight records have been made on each visit over a greater area than that in which nets are located, but the Striated Thornbill has not been recorded in July, August and September. This may be due to its habit of feeding in the canopy with no necessity to approach the waterhole area in the wetter months.

A group of six Striated Thornbills, including two juveniles, banded on 20 December 1964 (Nos. 011-15612 to 011-15617) was retrapped together 24 days later. Only one of these was recorded as juvenile on retrapping. Further visits have provided retraps of three birds of this group, each twice in differing combination with each other. Also, other individuals have been banded and retrapped together.

Of the 33 birds banded, seven banded at the last visit must be excluded from retrap data. Of the remaining 26, there have been 21 retraps of 12 individuals, i.e. 46 per cent have been retrapped.

Band Numbers		20.12.64						
011-		13.1.65						
15612*	B	R						
15613	B	R						
15614*	B	R						
15615	B	R		R	R			
15616	B	R		R				
15617	B	R			R			
15643	B		R					
15646	B	R						
15931	B	R	R					
15940	B	R			R			
15942*	B	R						
53655						B	R	

*Juvenile B=banded R=retrapped

Examination of the above table does not suggest constancy of flock, but rather points to allegiance of a small population to a set area.

The position of the Brown Thornbill (*A. pusilla*) is quite different. It has been recorded throughout the year and 65 have been banded to date. Of the 61 retraps possibilities, there have been only 13 retraps of 11 individuals, i.e. 18 per cent. No birds banded on the same day have been retrapped together, nor have any juveniles been retrapped. This suggests that this species has a wider range than the Striated Thornbill, though the extent is not yet known.

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