

Variation in Fuscous Honeyeaters

The differences in colour of the eye ring, gape and bill of the Fuscous Honeyeater (*Meliphaga fusca*) are outlined and banders are asked to note these differences.

About two years ago, a chance remark and some hurried checking brought to light the fact that all Fuscous Honeyeaters banded at St Ives (Sydney) project area were, what was then thought to be, in juvenile plumage. This area comprises mainly coastal heath type vegetation with a profusion of flowering banksias (*Banksia ericifolia* and *B. marginata*) on which the honeyeaters feed during autumn and winter. Fuscous Honeyeaters are not normally found in such heath areas except during these seasons.

These 'juvenile' birds had a bright yellow ring around the eye and a bright yellow gape. The base of the bill was yellow with a light brown tip. Birds in this plumage were also being banded in the Shaws Creek project area in the foothills of the Blue Mountains west of Castlereagh, New South Wales. Fuscous Honeyeaters with a black eye ring, gape and bill were being caught also. The accompanying photographs show the differences.

S. G. Lane and R. G. Lonnon (1967) had

banded Fuscous Honeyeaters in the Cattai area as early as 1958 and a return to this area almost immediately ruled out the 'juvenile' idea. A bird banded seven years previously by Lane, when re-trapped, had the eye ring, gape and base of the bill yellow. Further evidence obtained in the same area has shown that this plumage difference is not sexual.

Records of eye, gape and bill colour, and the wing spans of all Fuscous Honeyeaters banded in the Sydney district have been taken for about two years and will be analysed at a later date.

Whenever these honeyeaters are caught, banders are asked to record details of the soft parts, particularly the bill, gape and eye ring. Data obtained from cloacal examination and skull ossification should also be recorded if possible.

I would be glad to receive summaries of this information from any bander.

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Fuscous Honeyeater—left: with yellow eye ring and gape; right: with completely black bill, gape and eye ring.

Photos: S. G. Lane