

Fuscous Honeyeaters in the Mudgee District

From September 1965 to March 1973, 43 banding trips were made to my banding station in the Munghorn Gap Nature Reserve, 38 km east of Mudgee, New South Wales. The habitat and banding site were described previously (Morris 1967) when information was given on the Yellow-tufted Honeyeater *Meliphaga melanops* in that area. The visits were from one to three days duration and on each occasion in addition to banding, an estimate was made of the number of birds of each species observed.

The Reserve, 5821 ha, consists mainly of dry sclerophyll forests, and Fuscous Honeyeaters *M. fusca* are reasonably common throughout although not recorded on every visit. In the period of the study 124 Fuscous Honeyeaters were banded, but only two have been retrapped and no recoveries have been reported away from the banding place. Cox and Hamilton (1889) recorded that this species was ". . . common everywhere [i.e. in the Mudgee district], eggs September to November or later." However, this has not been my experience, for in 82 visits to the Mudgee district and 53 visits and banding trips to the Munghorn Reserve in over eight years, I have not observed Fuscous Honeyeaters nesting or feeding young anywhere in the district. Nevertheless it is possible that some breeding does occur.

Banding data and sight observations indicate that Fuscous Honeyeaters are present throughout the year although I have no records for August. Numbers are greatest for the period December to June, when 115 were caught and 448 observed. In contrast, during the period July to November, 11 were caught and 12 observed! From these data it would seem that the Fuscous Honeyeaters apparently vacate at least the Munghorn Gap area during what must be their breeding season.

All birds caught for banding are examined for the colours of the soft parts and this information recorded. The majority of birds thus examined in the December-July period had yellow gapes, horn coloured bills with dark tips, and yellow eyerings, typical of the non-breeding soft part colours of these birds (Lane 1974).

Only five of the 124 birds banded had black bills, black gapes and dark eyerings. These were caught in July (1), September (1), October (2), and December (1). Also, one bird (021-48815) which had a yellow gape and yellow eyering when banded on 16 November 1965, was retrapped on 31 October 1967 when it had a black gape and dark eyering.

In addition, six birds were trapped which apparently were undertaking a change in soft part colours. Two caught in December had yellow gapes and black bills; two caught in January had pale gapes, black bills and dark eye-ring. On each occasion the soft part colours of the second bird recovered (banded in December 1968 and retrapped in April 1969) were yellow gape, horn-coloured bill with a dark tip, and yellow eyering.

From this evidence it would appear that in the Mudgee district at present, non-breeding flocks of Fuscous Honeyeaters are common during summer and autumn in Eucalyptus forests dominated by White Box *Eucalyptus albens*. The birds have yellow gapes, horn-coloured bills with dark tips, and yellow eyerings. The majority depart in July apparently to breed elsewhere, when they probably undergo a colour change of the soft parts. They return in December when the soft part colours of the adults are changing, or in later 'arrivals' have changed, to yellow gape and yellow eyering. This information complements that recorded by Spurge (1968) on soft part colour changes of Fuscous Honeyeaters in the Sydney region.

References

- Cox, J. D. and Hamilton, A. G. (1889), 'A List of the Birds of the Mudgee District', *Proc. Linn. Soc.* 4: 395-424.
Lane, S. G. (1974), 'Colour Change in Soft Parts of Fuscous Honeyeaters', *Aust. Bird Bander* 12: 55-57.
Morris, A. K. (1967), 'Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters in the Mudgee District', *Aust. Bird Bander* 5: 53-54.
Spurge, P. J. (1968), 'Variation in Fuscous Honeyeaters', *Aust. Bird Bander* 6: 58-59.

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