= Red @-@ headed myzomela =

The red @-@ headed myzomela or red @-@ headed honeyeater (Myzomela erythrocephala) is a passerine bird of the honeyeater family , Meliphagidae , found in Australia , Indonesia , and Papua New Guinea . Three subspecies are recognised , with the nominate race M. erythrocephala erythrocephala distributed around the tropical coastline of Australia .

At 12 centimetres (4 @.@ 7 in) , it is a small honeyeater with a short tail and relatively long down @-@ curved bill . It is sexually dimorphic and the male has a glossy red head and brown upperparts and paler grey @-@ brown underparts while the female has predominantly grey @-@ brown plumage . Its natural habitat is subtropical or tropical mangrove forests . It is very active when feeding in the tree canopy , darting from flower to flower and sallying for insects . It calls constantly as it feeds . While little has been documented on the red @-@ headed myzomela ? s breeding behaviour , it is recorded as building a small cup @-@ shaped nest in the mangroves and laying two or three oval , white eggs with small red blotches .

The red @-@ headed myzomela is widely distributed across the northern coastlines of Australia , though it is not abundant within this range . While the IUCN lists one sub @-@ species as being near threatened , as a whole the widespread range means that its conservation is of least concern .

= = Taxonomy = =

Myzomela erythrocephala was first described by John Gould in 1840 , from specimens located in King Sound , north Western Australia . As well as the nominate race M. erythrocephala erythrocephala , two additional subspecies are recognised : M. erythrocephala infuscata named by William Alexander Forbes in 1879 , and M. erythrocephala dammermani described by Friederich Wilhelm Sieber in 1928 . Some taxonomic authorities recognize M. erythrocephala dammermani as a separate species , the Sumba myzomela (Myzomela dammermani) .

It is a member of the genus Myzomela which includes two other Australian species , the scarlet myzomela of eastern Australia , and the dusky myzomela of northern Australia . It belongs to the honeyeater family Meliphagidae . A 2004 genetic study of nuclear and mitochondrial DNA of honeyeaters found it to be the next closest relative to a smaller group consisting of the scarlet and cardinal myzomelas , although only five of the thirty members of the genus Myzomela were analysed . Molecular analysis has shown honeyeaters to be related to the Pardalotidae (pardalotes) , Acanthizidae (Australian warblers , scrubwrens , thornbills , etc .) , and the Maluridae (Australian fairy @-@ wrens) in a large Meliphagoidea superfamily . Because the red @-@ headed honeyeater occurs on many offshore islands and appears to be an effective water @-@ crosser , it has been hypothesised that north @-@ western Australia was the primary centre of origin for the Myzomela erythrocephala subspecies .

The genus name is derived from the Ancient Greek words myzo " to suckle " and meli " honey " , and refers to the bird 's nectivorous habits , while erythrocephala is from the Greek erythros " red " and a combining form of the Greek kephale " head " . Other common names are mangrove red @-@ headed honeyeater , mangrove redhead , and blood bird .

= = Description = =

The red @-@ headed myzomela is a distinctive small honeyeater with a compact body , short tail and relatively long down @-@ curved bill . It averages 12 centimetres (4 @.@ 7 in) , with a wingspan of 17 ? 19 centimetres (6 @.@ 7 ? 7 @.@ 5 in) and a weight of 8 grams (0 @.@ 28 oz) . The birds exhibit sexual dimorphism , with males being slightly larger and much more brightly coloured than the females .

The adult male has a dark red head , neck , lower back and rump ; the red is glossy , reflecting bright light . The rest of the upper body is a blackish @-@ brown , and the upper breast and under @-@ body a light brownish @-@ grey . The bill is black or blackish @-@ brown , and there is a distinct black loral stripe that extends to become a narrow eye ring . The adult female 's head and

neck are grey @-@ brown with a pink @-@ red tint to the forehead and chin . The rest of the female 's upper body is grey @-@ brown with darker shades on the wings and lighter shades on the breast and under @-@ body . One study suggested a connection between the female 's bill colour and breeding status , with birds that had a horn @-@ coloured (grey) bill also having well @-@ developed brood patches . Juveniles are similar to females though with an obvious pale yellow edge to the lower mandible . It seems that males keep their juvenile plumage for up to three months , and take a similar period to come into full colour . The subspecies are similar in appearance to the nominate race however M. e. dammermani is slightly smaller than the other subspecies and has darker upper parts and a broad black pectoral band and M. e. infuscata has red extending from the rump onto the back .

The red @-@ headed myzomela has a range of contact calls and songs that are primarily metallic or scratchy . Its song is an abrupt tchwip @-@ tchwip @-@ tchwip @-@ tchwip with a slightly softer swip @-@ swip @-@ swip @-@ swip contact call and a scolding charrk @-@ charrk .

= = Distribution and habitat = =

The red @-@ headed myzomela in Australia is distributed across the tropical coastlines of Western Australia , the Northern Territory and Queensland . It inhabits coastal areas of the Kimberley and various offshore islands in Western Australia , and is similarly distributed in the Northern Territory , including Melville Island and the Sir Edward Pellew Group of Islands . It is widespread around the coast of the Gulf of Carpentaria and Cape York Peninsula . M. e. dammermani is found on the island of Sumba in the eastern Indonesian Lesser Sunda Islands , and M. e. infuscata at scattered sites in West Papua and in south Papua New Guinea .

Although the red @-@ headed myzomela is widely distributed , it is not abundant within its range . The largest recorded population was 5 @.@ 5 birds per hectare or 2 @.@ 2 per acre at Palmerston in the Northern Territory . The peak abundance of the species in the mangroves around Darwin Harbour during the mid @-@ dry and early wet season coincided with the production of young and the flowering of Ceriops australis .

The species ' movements are poorly understood , variously described as resident , nomadic or migratory . Population numbers have been reported as fluctuating in some areas with local movements possibly related to the flowering of preferred mangrove and Melaleuca food trees , and there is some indication that the birds can travel more widely . A single bird was recaptured after being banded nearly five years earlier , 27 kilometres (17 mi) from the original banding site , and the species ' occupation of a large number of offshore islands suggests that the red @-@ headed honeyeater is effective at crossing distances over water .

The red @-@ headed myzomela mostly inhabits mangroves in monsoonal coastal areas , especially thickets of Rhizophora , Bruguiera and Avicennia bordering islands or in river deltas , but it often also occurs in paperbark thickets fringing the mangroves such as those of the cajeput (Melaleuca leucadendra) . It is a mangrove specialist , an adaptation that probably occurred as northern Australia became more arid and the bird populations became dependent on mangroves as other types of forest disappeared . The mangroves provide nectar and insects as well as shelter and nesting sites , and they supply the majority of the species ' needs for most of the year .

In Australia , mangrove vegetation forms a narrow discontinuous strip along thousands of kilometres of coastline , accommodating birds specialized for the habitat . Eighty Mile Beach in Western Australia has no mangroves and no fringing Melaleuca forests , reducing its potential for successful colonization by nectarivores , and it marks the southern limit of the red @-@ headed myzomela in Western Australia .

= = Behaviour = =

= = = Feeding = = =

The red @-@ headed myzomela is arboreal , feeding at flowers and among the outer foliage in the crowns of mangroves and other flowering trees . It is very active when feeding , darting from flower to flower and sallying for insects . It probes flowers for nectar with its long curved bill , catches insects on the wing and gleans insects from leaves . It predominately feeds on mangrove species , and in north western Australia is the major pollinator of Bruguiera exaristata , however it also feeds in paperbarks and other coastal forests and has been recorded feeding in cultivated bottlebrush and Grevillea in Darwin gardens .

= = = Social behaviour = = =

While the social organisation of the red @-@ headed honeyeater is relatively unknown , it is reported as being usually solitary or found in pairs , though it has been described as forming loose associations with brown honeyeaters , and other mangrove @-@ feeding birds such as the northern fantail and yellow white @-@ eye . It is an inquisitive bird , and readily responds to pishing coming close to the caller to investigate the source of the sound and to warn off the intruder . It calls throughout the day when feeding , and males sing from exposed branches in the upper canopy of the food trees .

The red @-@ headed myzomela actively defends food trees , engaging in aggressive bill @-@ wiping both in response to a threat and after chasing intruders from a tree . It is very antagonistic even towards its own species ; the males fight by grappling in mid @-@ air and falling close to the ground before disengaging . It constantly chases brown honeyeaters through the canopy , though it has not been observed in grappling fights with other species .

= = = Breeding = = =

There are few scientific reports on the breeding behaviour of the red @-@ headed myzomela , and little detail is available on the breeding season . A study of populations in the west Kimberley reported that the birds hold territories through much of the dry season and then disperse . The nest is built in the foliage of the mangroves , suspended by a rim from a small horizontal fork about 6 ? 10 metres (20 ? 33 ft) above the ground or water . The nest is small and cup @-@ shaped , and built from small pieces of bark , leaves , plant fibre and sometimes seaweed , bound together with spider web and lined with finer material . It is , on average , 5 @.@ 4 centimetres (2 @.@ 1 in) in diameter and 3 @.@ 7 centimetres (1 @.@ 5 in) deep .

Measuring 16 by 12 millimetres (0 @.@ 63 by 0 @.@ 47 in) , the eggs are oval , smooth and lustreless white , with small spots or blotches of red on the larger end . Clutch size is reported to be two or three eggs . While there is no reliable information on incubation and feeding , it is believed that both parents are active in caring for the young .

= = Conservation status = =

M. e. erythrocephala is listed as being of least concern by the IUCN , because the population is widespread , however Myzomela erythrocephala infuscata is listed as near threatened . The Australian population of this subspecies is confined to three small islands with a combined area of about 100 square kilometres (39 sq mi) . There is no immediate threat to the red @-@ headed myzomela except the risk posed to low islands by rising sea levels , however it has been recommended that community @-@ based ecotourism on the tropical coast be promoted , as it could lead to monitoring of sub @-@ populations and habitat by visiting birdwatchers and local rangers .