

= Striped honeyeater =

The striped honeyeater (*Plectorhyncha lanceolata*) is a passerine bird of the honeyeater family , Meliphagidae , found in Australia . It is a medium @-@ sized honeyeater , about 23 centimetres (9 @.@ 1 in) in length . Both sexes are a light greyish brown with dark brown centres to the feathers , which give the appearance of stripes . The stripes are particularly distinct on the head and back of the neck . While it is found mainly in inland eastern Australia where it inhabits the drier open forests , it is also found in coastal swamp forests from south east Queensland to the central coast of New South Wales .

Although a honeyeater , the striped honeyeater relies on insects as its major food source , and its bill has been adapted to an insect diet . When not breeding it has been recorded feeding and travelling in small groups , but it nests singly , laying around three eggs in a deep cup @-@ shaped nest suspended from the end of drooping branches . It is widely distributed and common within its range , thus the population is listed as being of least concern for conservation by the IUCN .

= Taxonomy =

The striped honeyeater was first described by English ornithologist and bird artist , John Gould , in A Synopsis of the Birds of Australia and the Adjacent Islands , published in 1838 . It is a member of the family Meliphagidae , the honeyeaters , and the sole member of the monotypic genus *Plectorhyncha* . Molecular studies indicate that genus is closely allied to the monotypic genus *Grantiella* , though dissimilar in appearance . The painted honeyeater (*Grantiella picta*) and the striped honeyeater are part of a subclade that includes also *Philemon* and *Xanthotis* .

The genus name *Plectorhyncha* is derived from a combination of the Greek words for " a spear point " and " the bill " and refers to the fine pointed bill . The species name *lanceolata* comes from the Latin for " lance @-@ shaped " in reference to the long pointed feathers on the throat and breast . The bird is also referred to as the lanceolated honeyeater .

Honeyeaters are related to the Pardalotidae (pardalotes) , Acanthizidae (Australian warblers , scrubwrens , thornbills , etc .) , and the Maluridae (Australian fairy @-@ wrens) in a large Meliphagoidea superfamily .

= Description =

The striped honeyeater is a medium @-@ sized honeyeater with a body length of 22 ? 25 centimetres (8 @.@ 7 ? 9 @.@ 8 in) , a wingspan of 28 ? 36 centimetres (11 ? 14 in) , and an average weight of 40 grams (1 @.@ 4 oz) .

The upper parts are generally light greyish brown with dark brown centres to the feathers , giving the appearance of stripes . These stripes are marked on the head and nape , less distinct on the rump and almost absent from the upper tail coverts . The underparts are whitish with faint streaks on the belly . The feathers of the upper breast and throat are long and pointed , giving the head a spiky appearance . The wing and tail are both moderately long with rounded tips . The bill is short , with a sharp pointed appearance , dark blue @-@ grey grading to a grey @-@ black at the tip and around the nostrils . Legs and feet are blue @-@ grey with black claws . The bare skin around the eye is dark brown and the iris a dark black @-@ brown .

Males and females are similar in appearance . Juvenile birds are slightly browner than the adults , with buff or brown edges to the feathers of the wings and back . Juveniles have a duller , less streaked appearance than adults . Juveniles moult into adult plumage at around one year old . There is no seasonal difference in the plumage of breeding birds .

The striped honeyeater 's song is described as a chirp , chirp , cherry , cherry , its contact call as a sharp chewee and its alarm call as a shrill whistling note .

= Distribution and habitat =

This species is found mainly in eastern Australia , predominantly inland . It inhabits the drier open forests such as mallee and mulga but also heathland and mangroves on the coast . An observer in 1923 was surprised to find a small number of striped honeyeaters nesting at Forster on the New South Wales mid @-@ north coast , saying " it is a remarkable fact for this bird to leave its proper habitat so far inland , to come to the coast " . However the range has expanded , and contemporary accounts give its distribution as eastern Australia from central and south @-@ east Queensland extending inland to south @-@ east South Australia , and to the coast south to the Tuggerah Lakes , New South Wales . Small irruptions associated with weather patterns and habitat changes have been recorded in areas outside its usual range including the Grampians and the Adelaide Plains .

It occurs in a wide variety of habitats , including riparian woodlands such as river red gum , bumble box and black box with an understory of lignum or saltbush ; mallee woodland , especially where mixed with thickets of Broombush or Emu Bush ; woodlands of Native Pine growing on sand ridges ; and semi @-@ arid scrubland dominated by Acacia including lancewood . On the coast The striped honeyeater is found in swamp forests of paperbark and Casuarina , and in developed areas containing native and exotic trees and shrubs such as caravan parks , reserves , gardens , and farms and orchards .

= = Behaviour = =

= = = Feeding = = =

Although a honeyeater in origin , the striped honeyeater 's food source is primarily insects , and its diet includes seeds and fruits as well as nectar . Its bill has evolved to a short , straight , sharply pointed shape more suited to probing crevices for insects , than to probing flower tubes . It has the honeyeater ? s brush tongue and takes nectar from shallow flowers such as eucalypt blossoms .

It is arboreal , mostly feeding amongst the foliage in the canopy of trees . Most food is obtained from the leaves , and less often from the bark or flowers and fruit . The major foraging methods are gleaning from leaves and dead branches , probing under loose bark and in crevices , probing woody fruits of Black Oak , probing flowers of Yorrrell (*Eucalyptus gracilis*) and sallying for insects . The striped honeyeater occasionally hangs upside @-@ down to extract insects .

= = = Social behaviour = = =

The striped honeyeater has most often been observed singly or in twos , and occasionally in small flocks . When not breeding it has been recorded feeding in loose mobile groups , drinking in mixed groups with miners , and travelling in small groups . It engages in a high level of social activity , including perching closely and allopreening , and when feeding in groups chasing , calling and scolding . The non @-@ breeding striped honeyeater is vocal , calling while feeding and perching , though only occasionally calling in flight . It has been recorded engaged in a display of wing raising and calling , and performing duets and call @-@ and @-@ response song .

While the striped honeyeater aggressively defends its nest by dive @-@ bombing people and animals who come too close , and has been observed singing from display perches , it is not known to be territorial . It often feeds near other species of honeyeater and no inter @-@ species aggression has been noted .

= = = Breeding = = =

The striped honeyeater breeds throughout its distribution range , usually as simple pairs , with both sexes building the nest , incubating and feeding the young . However cooperative breeding has been observed , with a third adult bird involved in feeding nestlings . It nests solitarily , and pairs use the same or adjoining trees for nesting over two or more seasons .

The breeding season is from August to January , though dependent on local conditions . The nest

site is usually in the drooping foliage of a tall shrub or low tree , such as *Casuarina* , *Melaleuca* , *Acacia* , and mallee eucalypts . The site is sometimes near to or overhanging water , and the nest is usually constructed at the end of a drooping branch , suspended from twigs or foliage . The striped honeyeater often nests in the vicinity of a nesting butcherbird . It builds a deep cup @-@ shaped or bag @-@ shaped nest , with thick walls and the lip of the opening turned slightly inwards . The nest is made from thin dry grass and coated with plant down , feathers or wool , the coating often completely obscuring the grass framework . It is lined with spider webs , hair , wool or rootlets , and on occasion flowers and tissue paper . The striped honeyeater will commonly re @-@ use material from previous nests .

The eggs are an elongated oval 2 @.@ 4 centimetres (0 @.@ 94 in) by 1 @.@ 7 centimetres (0 @.@ 67 in) somewhat pointed at one end . They are a dull white , smooth and lustreless or slightly lustrous , and moderately blotched with reddish @-@ brown marks over the whole shell , though more profusely towards and over the larger end . The striped honeyeater lays an average of three eggs at 24 @-@ hour intervals . The eggs are incubated by both parents who sit constantly in alternating periods of around 20 minutes for 16 or 17 days . The fledging period is also around 16 days .

The nests of the striped honeyeater are parasitized by the pallid cuckoo (*Cacomantis pallidus*) .

= = Conservation status = =

Because of its wide distribution and stable numbers , the population status of the striped honeyeater has been evaluated by the IUCN as being of least concern .