

# ADELAIDE AND MOUNT LOFTY RANGES SOUTH AUSTRALIA

## Threatened Species Profile

Department  
for Environment  
and Heritage

### *Melithreptus gularis gularis*

BIRD  
**Black-chinned Honeyeater**

AUS	SA	AMLR	Endemism	Residency
-	V	E	-	Resident



Photo: © David Paton

#### Conservation Significance

The AMLR distribution is part of a limited extant distribution in adjacent regions within SA. The species has been described as 'probably declining' within the AMLR.<sup>1</sup> Within the AMLR the species' relative area of occupancy is classified as 'Very Restricted'.<sup>2</sup>

Considered Near Threatened at the national level (Garnett and Crowley 2000).<sup>4</sup>

#### Description

Medium-sized, sexually dimorphic species. Most closely resembles the White-naped Honeyeater (*Melithreptus lunatus*) but adults are larger, have a white nape that extends all the way to the eye and a blue eye-wattle (bare skin) (Higgins et al. 2001).<sup>1</sup> The 'black chin' is not really black but more dark grey and indistinct (P. Paton pers. comm.). Very distinctive call, described as a "beautiful rich prrp prrp scorp scorp..." (Slater et al. 1989) and 'curious, high-pitched grating, croaking notes, often in flight; developed into song and often in concert (Pizzey and Knight 2003).<sup>1</sup>

#### Distribution and Population

Mostly occurs in eastern Australia, along inland slopes of Great Dividing Range, extending to the coast between Sydney and Newcastle, NSW, and again between Brisbane and Rockhampton, QLD, as well as westward into southeastern SA (Blakers et al. 1984, Schodde and Mason 1999). From Dubbo, NSW, to Rockhampton, QLD, it intergrades with *Melithreptus gularis* ssp. *laetior* in a broad band stretching west to southern Cape York Peninsula, and again around Mt

Isa. The sub-populations in AMLR may have been isolated historically (Schodde and Mason 1999).<sup>3</sup>

Declines have occurred over most of its national range. Estimated extent of occurrence is 420,000 km<sup>2</sup> and decreasing. Estimated area of occupancy is 40,000 km<sup>2</sup> and decreasing. Number of breeding birds estimated at 50,000 and decreasing. Number of sub-populations is estimated at 20, with the largest being of 30,000 breeding birds.<sup>3</sup>

Mainly occur in isolated areas along the foothills of the ranges In the AMLR. A field survey suggested that in areas of occurrence individuals are present at about 0.1 birds per hectare (Willoughby 2005).<sup>1</sup>

Post-1983 AMLR filtered records throughout the MLR from Kaiserstuhl CP and Rowland Flat in the north to the eastern Fleurieu Peninsula around Victor Harbor and Goolwa. This includes some coastal records in the Noarlunga-Morphett Vale area as well as eastern flanks areas around Harrogate and Rockleigh.<sup>2</sup>

The distribution has contracted in the AMLR during the course of the 20th century to approximately 11 sites by the mid 1990s and is still declining (Paton et al. 1994, Chapman 1995).<sup>3</sup>

Around the Adelaide urban area, records from approximately 1990 to 2008, indicate they have disappeared from some sites (e.g. Athelstone) but have appeared at others (e.g. Salisbury and Morphett Vale). Similarly, outside the metropolitan area, in the 1980s and even very early 1990s, they were regularly recorded around Ashbourne; since then there have been just a few records of mainly single birds nearby but not at the exact spot (e.g. Bullock Hill). During the last eight years they have been recorded in the Strathalbyn area and appear to be resident. Recently there has been confirmed breeding from the Morphett Vale and Victor Harbor/Port Elliot areas (P. Paton pers. comm.).

#### Habitat

Occupy dry Eucalypt woodland with an annual rainfall range of 400-700 mm, particularly associations containing ironbark and box (Blakers et al. 1984, Emison et al. 1987).<sup>3</sup> Favoured habitats incorporate a mixture of mature and regenerating woodland Eucalypts, although adjacent scattered paddock trees are also used (G. Carpenter pers. comm.).

#### Further information:

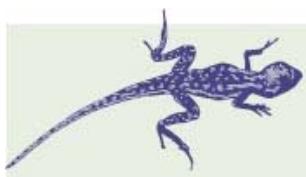
Biodiversity Conservation Unit, Adelaide Region  
Phone: (61 8) 8336 0901 Fax: (61 8) 8336 0999  
<http://www.environment.sa.gov.au/>

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Prepared as part of the Regional Recovery Plan for Threatened Species and Ecological Communities of Adelaide and the Mount Lofty Ranges, South Australia 2009 - 2014



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A large home range may be utilised but may have core areas of greater activity, totalling about 20 ha (Willoughby 2005).<sup>1</sup>

Within the AMLR the preferred broad vegetation groups are Grassy Woodland, Heathy Woodland and Riparian.<sup>2</sup>

### Biology and Ecology

Most commonly seen in small groups of two or three individuals, but also sometimes in larger groups.<sup>1</sup>

Abundance is highly correlated with the abundance of New Holland Honeyeater (*Phylidonyris novaehollandiae*) probably due to a shared preference for resources (Paton 2002).<sup>1</sup> Home range and time-budget studies suggest the species requires a large home range (approx. 140 ha) to meet their foraging needs (Chapman 1995; Paton 2002).<sup>1</sup>

Feed on insects, nectar and lerps (Blakers et al. 1984), and build suspended nests in which two eggs are usually laid (Beruldsen 1980).<sup>3</sup>

In the AMLR, the approximate breeding season is from September to February (P. Paton pers. comm.). Nests are usually built in the drooping, outer foliage of Eucalypts, but also mistletoes and occasionally other species (Higgins et al. 2001). The clutch size is usually two to three eggs, and incubation is approximately 14 days (Higgins et al. 2001). The incidence of communal breeding and the circumstances under which it occurs have not been established, although it does occur (Higgins et al. 2001; Willoughby 2005).<sup>1</sup>

Higgins et al. (2001) summary of banding records indicate that most banding recoveries have occurred within 10 km of the original banding site.<sup>1</sup> However, in the AMLR, a recent banding recovery was approximately 18 km from the original banding site (P. Paton pers. comm.).

Paton (1979; 1980; 1985) found that the abundance, breeding and physical condition of the New Holland Honeyeater, and other honeyeaters, relied on carbohydrate resources (nectar, manna or honeydew). When these resources were scarce, the number of honeyeaters was reduced and a greater proportion of their time was spent foraging (Paton 1985). The Black-chinned Honeyeater probably forages more from foliage than from bark, although this may depend on what substrates are available (Willoughby 2005).<sup>1</sup>

### Aboriginal Significance

Post-1983 records indicate the AMLR distribution occurs in all Aboriginal Nations (Kaurna, Ngadjuri, Nganguraku, Ngarrindjeri and Peramangk).<sup>2</sup>

### Threats

Lack of large areas of suitable habitat (due to past clearance and fragmentation) is probably the greatest barrier to recovery of populations in the MLR.<sup>1</sup> However, they are unlikely to be limited in their ability to move through fragmented landscapes (Willoughby 2005).<sup>1,3</sup>

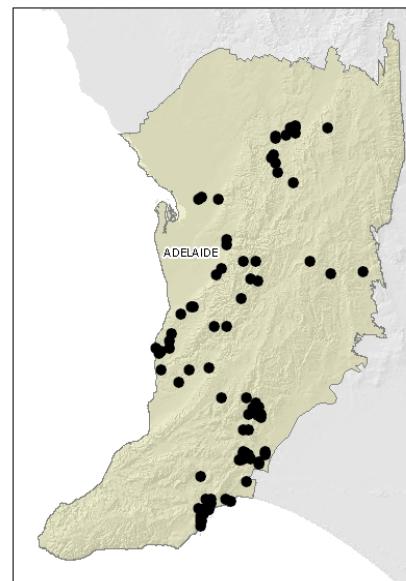
Prescribed burning is unlikely to impact on the species provided regenerating woodland Eucalypts are available (G. Carpenter pers. comm.).

Potential exploitative competition and aggressive behaviour from New Holland Honeyeaters are likely to have a significant impact (Willoughby 2005). The Red Wattlebird and Noisy Miner are also likely competitors.<sup>1</sup>

Invasion of woody weeds reduces habitat value but some woody weeds may provide nesting sites (Willoughby 2005). The invasion of grassy Eucalypt woodlands by woody weeds is also likely to increase the year round presence of New Holland Honeyeater.<sup>1</sup>

Additional current direct threats have been identified and rated for this species. Refer to the main plan accompanying these profiles.

### Regional Distribution



Map based on filtered post-1983 records.<sup>2</sup> Note, this map does not necessarily represent the actual species' distribution within the AMLR.

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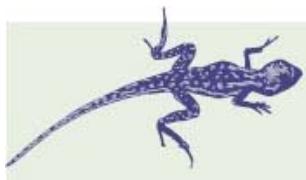
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#### References

Note: In some cases original reference sources are not included in this list, however they can be obtained from the reference from which the information has been sourced (the reference cited in superscript).

**1** Cale, B. (2005). *Towards a Recovery Plan for the Declining Birds of the Mount Lofty Ranges*. Scientific Resource Document for Birds for Biodiversity. Unpublished Report.

**2** Department for Environment and Heritage (2007). *Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges Regional Recovery Pilot Project Database*. Unpublished data extracted and edited from BDBSA, SA Herbarium (July 2007) and other sources.

**3** Garnett, S. T. and Crowley, G. M. (2000). *The Action Plan for Australian Birds*. Environment Australia, Commonwealth of Australia.

**4** Turner, M. S. (2001). *Conserving Adelaide's Biodiversity: Resources*. Urban Forest Biodiversity Program, Adelaide.

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