

MELITHREPTUS LÆTIOR, *Gould.*

Beautiful Honey-eater.

Melithreptus lætiior, Gould, Ann. & Mag. Nat. Hist. 4th series, Oct. 1875, p. 287.

ALTHOUGH the members of this little but well-defined genus of Honey-eaters are so generally distributed over the great continent of Australia and Tasmania, as yet no single species has been discovered in any other country. What New Guinea will give us, time alone will testify. All the species of the genus *Melithreptus* are of small size, and characterized by being very similarly coloured; yet, with all this, if due attention be given to certain peculiar characters, the specific distinctions are very evident. All have the eyelash thickened and bare of feathers; and in each species this naked skin is differently coloured: for instance, in the larger species inhabiting Tasmania the skin is described by me from the life as being white tinged with bright green; while I have noted (also from the living birds) that the *M. gularis* of New South Wales is of a beautiful bluish green. In the present bird, which is intimately allied to the species just mentioned, the eyelash is bright yellow. After remarking that in the common *M. lunulatus* of New South Wales these same parts are bright scarlet, it will not be necessary to say more on this point with regard to the species found in Western Australia, Port Essington, and Cape York. Every country surrounding Australia has, then, it will be seen, a species of this genus peculiarly its own; and that the more distant interior does not want a representative is evidenced by Mr. F. W. Andrews's discovery of the beautiful bird now under consideration. One thing, I expect, is pretty certain, that wherever there are Eucalypti, such trees will be enlivened by one or another species of the present group. It has always been a supposition on my part that some larger species will yet be discovered, so that *Melithreptus* and the great *Entomyzæ* will become more nearly united than they are now.

In writing to me about this bird, Mr. Waterhouse, to whom I am indebted for a beautiful specimen, says:—"This is the finest species of the genus that I have yet seen. Only four were shot, and I send you one of the best. When alive they had a bright yellow rim round the eyes."

The following is a transcript from my original description as published in the 'Annals':—

Head and nape black, as well as the lores and ear-coverts; the cheeks and a band of feathers round the occiput pure white; back greenish yellow, brighter on the rump and shading off into bright lemon-yellow on the hind neck and sides of the latter; tail brown, with a narrow whitish edging at the tip, all but the outer feathers margined with greenish yellow; wings ashy brown, externally washed with grey, the primaries narrowly margined with whitish; under surface of body white, the breast and flanks shaded with ashy, and the chin black, fading into ashy brown on the throat and producing a distinct chin-stripe; under wing-coverts white, shaded with ashy; naked skin surrounding the eye bright yellow.

Total length 5.5 inches, culmen 0.6, wing 3.4, tail 2.7, tarsus 0.75.

Although very closely allied to *M. gularis*, this species is altogether a much more finely coloured bird. In size it is slightly larger, and is at once to be distinguished by its white under surface and the beautiful lemon-yellow of the neck, as well as by the yellow naked skin surrounding the eye, which part is greenish blue in *M. gularis*. The ashy shade which pervades the entire lower surface of *M. gularis* is not seen in *M. lætiior*.

The figures are of the natural size.