

Winter Colours Herald Spring

by Ed Parker

Gold, scarlet and silver, those noble colours, provide the setting for this month's article. As we move out of a cold, wet winter, these are some of the colours that have celebrated the approach of spring in our bush and backyards.

GOLD is that of the wattles, and what a magnificent display they have been this year! In our local Centenary bushland areas, and in gardens, many of the nine or so species of locally-occurring wattles have filled the air with their fragrance. The colours of different species range from gold through to various shades of paler yellow.

SCARLET is the colour that was observed in a special little visitor to our backyard in late July. Standing out against the similarly coloured flowering Red Callistemon, was a diminutive but bright bird with a brilliant scarlet red head, chest and back. The scarlet was set off against its black wings and white underbelly. Its size at 10cm long is about two-thirds of that of a common sparrow.

Binocular observations confirmed it to be the Scarlet Honeyeater (*Myzomela sanguinolenta*). On the fresh but sunny winter's early morning it had flown into the yard to feed. The Callistemon, heavily-laden with red bottle-brush flowers, was its favoured target. The honeyeater had the characteristic slightly curved beak, enabling it to feed upon the nectar from the Callistemon flowers.

The dashing scarlet-coloured male honeyeater was accompanied by a number of females with their more subdued olive-brown colouring.

SILVER is a colour not normally observed in the natural living world, but it does give its name to the Silvereye, a small 12cm long bird. The silver reference comes from its prominent white eye-ring contrasting with its olive-yellow head. The

species observed had a grey back, olive wings with black edges, and a whitish-grey underbelly.

The Callistemon, again, was the host to these early morning visitors. What was really significant was the number of birds, some one to two dozen, in what can only be described as a feeding frenzy on the red Callistemon flowers and insects harbouring in the backyard tree. These hungry visitors came most early mornings for some one to two weeks in early August. Noisily chirping they eagerly devoured the food available.

Their feeding habit was not surprising given that they may well have just migrated from Tasmania to southern Queensland as some races of the Silvereyes do. The scientific name of the species is *Zosterops lateralis*.

The Silvereye, as with the Honeyeaters, have a brush-tipped tongue enabling them to take advantage of the nectar offered by many of our flowering native plants such as Callistemons, Grevilleas and Banksias.

Winter flowering and fruiting native plants in our gardens and bushland are crucial. They sustain our suburban (and migratory) wildlife during these lean months, as evidenced by these observations.

This regular Nature Watch column is contributed by your local Centenary bushland care groups.

Enquiries: Westlake/Riverhills: Ed 3376 1389, Maree 3376 5803; Jindalee: Noel 3376 1412.

Email: eparker@ozemail.com.au

Web: www.ozemail.com.au/~eparker/sorb.html