

Food and Habits of two Treecreepers. Mrs. E. M. McCulloch (1975) has drawn attention to the lack of information about the habits of treecreepers and to the absence of records relative to their drinking of water.

At Gwydir Park, 17 km south-west of Inverell in north-eastern New South Wales, I made field notes from 1962 to 1965 about the Brown Treecreeper, *Climacteris picumnis*, and the White-throated Treecreeper, *C. leucophaea*, which were common on the property, the former coming frequently to the house for food.

Both species were recorded as drinking at a water dish, noticeably so in drought periods. The Brown Treecreeper nested near the house; on other parts of the property breeding territories were always near water.

Picumnis invariably moved head first down the tree trunk and "pinked" loudly before drinking. After a shower in the dry autumn of 1965 *picumnis* picked at moss and lichen on granite rocks. These plants act as sponges conserving water for a day or two.

In October 1963 a pair of Brown Treecreepers fed fledglings positioned on a stump, some 40 m from the crumb-patch at the house. The birds took a roundabout route of 60 m, resting for two periods of thirty seconds each en route. After about 12 visits the adults flew 62 m to a creek, but whether to quench their thirst or to get water for the juveniles is not known. These may have derived sufficient water from their diet, for insects were always added to crumbs.

Brown Treecreepers ate bread crumbs, porridge, apple, pear, sultanas, cooked pumpkin and watermelon. Blowfly larvae from the carcase of a kangaroo were consumed. Eggs of jumper ants, *Myrmecia* sp, when exposed by shovelling, were quickly devoured, the birds hopping after me in anticipation of more.

Both the White-throated and Brown Treecreepers relished the melitose-sap which flows from eucalypts (Baldwin 1972). As the birds clung to the tree, the brush tongue swept the sweet sap into the open mandibles.

Foraging treecreepers paid special attention to the forks of branches where bark accumulated and covered many insects. Although they usually spiralled up trees they could with ease jump along under horizontal limbs. Hawking occurred.

There was a male dominated pecking order at the crumb-patch. The male Brown Treecreeper fed first after an aggressive display in which the chest was puffed out, tail flicked and loud "pinks" uttered. Female and young stood and waited until he finished and flew off. I have often watched a circle of hungry Sparrows, *Passer domesticus*, waiting for a male treecreeper to leave the crumb-patch, in the middle of which he sat motionless but watchful for several minutes.

Observations amounting to several hours showed that tail-flicking was habitual in *picumnis* but it was not seen in *leucophaea*. The quick upward flick occurred whenever a bird was temporarily immobile, such as perching, clinging sideways or sitting on the ground. Both sexes flicked. Heat induced a rapid tempo, three to four flicks per second, but this decreased in cold weather.

REFERENCES

- Baldwin, M., 1972. "Melitose-sap Lickers", *Birds*, 6 : 70-71.
 McCulloch, Ellen M., 1975. "Tongues of Passerine Birds", *Australian Bird Watcher*, 6 : 1-3.
Merle Baldwin, Gilgai, Inverell, New South Wales, 28/4/1975.

Food of White-throated Treecreeper. In the article on "Tongues of some Passerine birds", *Australian Bird Watcher*, 6 : 2, the author states that the White-throated Treecreeper, *Climacteris leucophaea*, was not expected to drink the "sweet liquid" from a bird-feeder, as the "literature records them eating only insects".

I have several acres in the Kinglake area adjacent to the National Park, which I visit regularly. At each weekly visit I have placed food, honey, porridge, "vogel" bread and cream cheese, and similar items, in containers and on the ground, along with a small water container, some 12 inches across, to attract birds and animals to come close by, so that they may be more readily observed.

The White-throated Treecreeper is a constant visitor, feeding on the different types of food placed on the ground. On several occasions fledglings have been fed bread. The water container is used for drinking, and for bathing by this species, as well as by many other birds.

While sitting outside the house, the White-throated Treecreeper has often landed in a tree within 2 m of me without appearing to be disturbed by my presence.

Miss Karma Hastwell, Richmond, Victoria, 13/5/1975.

White-throated Treecreeper bathing. Following on the comments by Mrs. E. McCulloch regarding the White-throated Treecreeper, *Climacteris leucophaea*, (*Australian Bird Watcher*, 6 : 2), I have found that since coming to live in Mount Beauty seven years ago, there has been a treecreeper in my garden every summer, spending most of its time in a big camphor laurel tree, under which I keep water pots for the birds. Many times have I seen it drink from these vessels, sometimes clinging to the stem of the tin and leaning down to the water.

Several times this hot summer it has had a bath, going back and back again into the water until it was thoroughly wet.

In addition to bathing, this year's visitor has been extremely vocal, uttering a very attractive warbling call off and on all day, mixed in with the usual piping notes.

Miss A. C. Snell, Mount Beauty, Victoria, 6/4/1975.