

**Nests and Eggs of the Papuan Scrub-wren *Sericornis papuensis* (Acanthizidae)  
and Grey-streaked Honeyeater *Ptiloprora perstriata* (Meliphagidae)**

The Papuan Scrub-wren *Sericornis papuensis* is a highland forest-dwelling species found throughout the central ranges and Foya Mountains of New Guinea at altitudes between 2 100 and 3 500 (rarely to 1 700) metres (Beehler et al. 1986). The Grey-streaked Honeyeater *Ptiloprora perstriata* is a highland forest-dwelling species found on the central ranges and the mountains of the Wandammen Peninsula of New Guinea at altitudes above 1 700 m, but in the south-east of New Guinea it occurs only above 2 500 m (Beehler et al. 1986). The nests and eggs of the Papuan Scrub-wren and the Grey-streaked Honeyeater have not been described (Rand & Gilliard 1967, Diamond 1972, Frith 1979). In October 1986 at an altitude of 2 700 m in the Tari Gap (05°57'S, 143°10'E), Southern Highlands Province, Papua New Guinea, we found two nests of the Papuan Scrub-wren and one nest of the Grey-streaked Honeyeater.

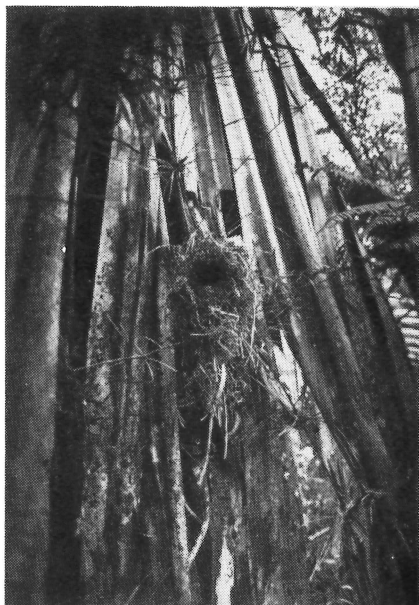
On 21 October in a dense Scrambling Bamboo *Nastus productus* thicket beneath moss forest, we discovered a Papuan Scrub-wren nest containing one egg. This nest was suspended from the Scrambling Bamboo 1.5 m above ground, beneath a dense sheltering thicket of this plant. On 22 October an incubating adult was caught by hand at the nest entrance for brief examination to confirm species identification, and was released immediately to be watched returning into the nest and sitting in the nest cup to incubate.

The nest was a suspended tear-shaped structure typical of some *Sericornis* species, attached above by nest material and with a small 'porch' above the side entrance hole (Plate 38). Hanging from the nest entrance side of the globular bottom of the nest was a 125 mm 'tail' of moss. External nest material was very predominantly live green moss, with fine plant tendrils visible about the entrance hole and 'porch'. The nest chamber was lined inside with dried Scrambling Bamboo leaves, and the egg cup was lined with small unidentified feathers. The diameter across the nest entrance hole was 32 mm and the distance from the bottom of the entrance hole, or entrance perch, to the lower edge of the porch above the entrance hole was 43 mm. The vertical nest length, from point of attachment above to the exterior base of the egg chamber was 185 mm and the mossy 'tail' extended 125 mm below this. The maximum measurement from the external nest wall just beneath the entrance hole to the opposite external ('back') wall was 137 mm.

The single egg measured 19.7 x 14.8 mm, and weighed 2.1 g. It was a dirty pale fawn, slightly darker at the larger end, to almost cream-white on the pointed end. Egg decoration consisted of sparse, dark brown fine squiggles and lines mostly on the larger end, with some markings swirling about the middle and fine, granular, sparse brown-purple spotting over the entire surface (Plate 39). This egg coloration is unlike any of those of the seven Australian *Sericornis* illustrated by Beruldsen (1980).

Another nest of this species containing a single egg was found on 21 October 1986 at midday. This nest and egg were nearly identical in material and coloration respectively to the above. This second nest was also suspended from live Scrambling Bamboo, at 1.75 m above ground and directly beneath the canopy of a low *Pandanus* tree crown in moss forest with much Scrambling Bamboo and many *Pandanus* trees. On 23 October it still contained a single warm egg.

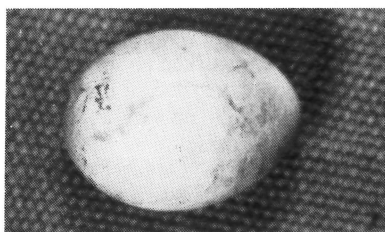
The above observations suggest that this species may lay a single-egg clutch, unlike better known congeneric species for which clutches of two to four eggs are recorded (Rand & Gilliard 1967, Pizzey 1980, Beruldsen 1980) but many more nest records are required to confirm this. We take the opportunity to note that, whilst a calling



**Nest of Papuan Scrub-wren, suspended  
from Scrambling Bamboo with *Pandanus*  
fronds behind**

Plate 38

Photo: C.B. Frith



**Egg of Papuan Scrub-wren**

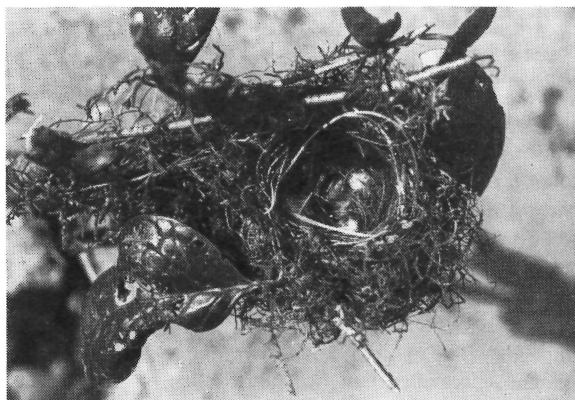
Plate 39

Photo: C.B. Frith

(a)



(b)



**Nest of Grey-streaked Honeyeater, viewed from the side (a) and from above (b)**

Plate 40 a, b

Photos: C.B. Frith

Mountain Mouse Warbler *Crateroscelis robusta* was being removed from a mist net in moss forest on the Tari Gap remote from the above nests, two Papuan Scrub-wrens performed a 'broken wing' distraction display across the forest floor (A. Taplin pers. comm.).

On 7 October CBF found a Grey-streaked Honeyeater nest containing a single egg. The cup-shaped, deep bulky nest (Plate 40) was situated 2.5 m high in a 4.5 m tall sapling beneath moss forest near (5 m) the edge of a small patch of sub-alpine grassland. The nest structure was suspended from a sapling branch fork by its rim, the materials of which were worked about the supporting branches. The great majority of external nest material consisted of live green moss, some of which hung down and out from the outer nest wall up to 65 to 90 mm. The inside of the nest cup was compactly lined with hair-fine russet plant fibres and some slightly stouter white fibres of more than 250 mm in length. On top of this lining of fibres, in the centre of the nest cup, were approximately twelve small unidentified downy feathers. Maximum external nest depth, from upper cup rim to lowest point, was 110 mm, and maximum external nest cup rim diameter 105 mm. Inside diameter of the nest cup at the rim was 62 mm and maximum nest cup depth, from floor to rim, 45 mm.

The egg measured 24.1 x 17.1 mm and was pale pink covered with fine and sparse weak russet spots and blotches, denser about the larger end. An arriving and incubating parent was observed through 8 x 35 field glasses from a distance of four to five metres to identify the species, as the similar Rufous-backed Honeyeater *Ptiloprora guisei* is sympatric, but far less abundant, in this area. CBF had become familiar with both species, in the field and the hand, during the previous month. The parent bird observed was of the larger size of the Grey-streaked Honeyeater and had an entirely heavily black-streaked grey crown, nape and back with no russet coloration whatever (cf. Beehler et al. 1986). As the nest was empty upon subsequent examination, we cannot comment on clutch size.

The measurements of the above egg are consistent in relative size with that of the closely related but slightly smaller Rufous-backed Honeyeater collected from south-east New Guinea, which were 22.4 x 15.5 mm. The latter egg was, however, 'white very sparsely spotted with fine markings of black, brown and purple which are a little larger and denser at the larger end' (Frith 1971).

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## References

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