

# What is a Helmeted Honeyeater?

The Helmeted Honeyeater *Lichenostomus melanops cassidix* is the largest and most colourful subspecies of Yellow-Tufted Honeyeaters. It is found only in Victoria; a perfect choice for the State's Bird Emblem.



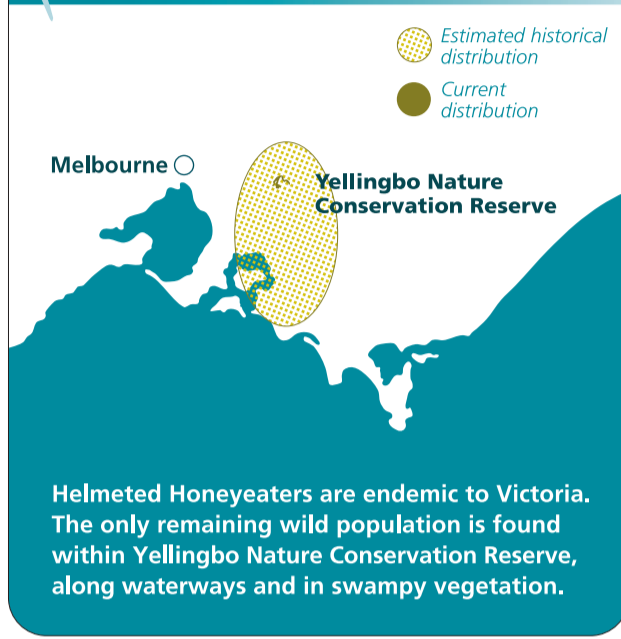
## Features and adaptations

- 1 Yellow helmet**  
The yellow crest of feathers on their forehead can be pushed up. Its large size is a unique feature of the subspecies.
- 2 Yellow ear tufts**  
Bright yellow tufts of feathers near the ears contrast boldly with their black cheeks.
- 3 Brush-tipped tongue**  
A long, paintbrush-like tongue that extends past their curved, pointy beak is useful for collecting nectar, honeydew and manna.
- 4 Song**  
Helmeted Honeyeaters are songbirds. They use song to find a mate and identify themselves and their territory.
- 5 Camouflage**  
Dark grey back feathers and a yellow underside camouflage the birds as they flit through the forest.
- 6 Monomorphism**  
Females and males do not differ in colour. Their sex can be identified through genetic studies or reproductive behaviour; only females sit on eggs.

## Helmeted Honeyeater Population Size

There are about 240 wild Helmeted Honeyeaters living in Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve and several captive breeding pairs in Victoria. Each year captive fledglings are released into the wild to boost population size.

## Where are they found?



The highly restricted distribution of Helmeted Honeyeaters is linked to forest type and hydrology. Their preferred habitat is dense riparian forest at low altitudes with high and dependable rainfall. Much of their suitable habitat, ranging from east of Melbourne to West Gippsland has been cleared for agriculture and housing purposes.

### CANOPY

- Manna Gum *Eucalyptus viminalis*
- Swamp Gum *Eucalyptus ovata*
- Mountain Swamp Gum *Eucalyptus camphora humeana*

### UNDERSTORY

- Tussock grass
- Scented Paperbark *Melaleuca squarrosa*
- Swamp Paperbark *Melaleuca ericifolia*
- Woolly Tea-tree *Leptospermum lanigerum*
- Prickly Currant-bush *Coprosma quadrifida*

### WATERWAY

## Why are they Critically Endangered?

Human activity has led to significant habitat degradation; riparian forests east of Melbourne are now rarely more than 100m in width.

- Land clearing for agriculture and housing has reduced availability and connectedness of suitable habitat.
- Altered hydrology due to agricultural and other land-use practices has lowered water availability and changed water flows, leading to die-off in eucalypts, tea-trees and paperbarks.
- Edge effects have created suitable habitat for the successful native bird competitor, Bell Miner *Manorina melanophrys*.
- Introduced predators such as the Red Fox and Black Rat predate on eggs and young birds before they can mature.

The following processes are most threatening to species with a small population and restricted distribution because individuals have nowhere to escape: bushfire, land clearing, drought, disease, changed hydrology and flooding patterns, climate change, inbreeding depression.

## What's the solution?

Many groups are working together to ensure a long-term future for Helmeted Honeyeaters in the wild. Some of these groups include Parks Victoria, Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), Zoos Victoria, Melbourne Water and Greening Australia.

### Restore

Captive breeding takes place at Healesville Sanctuary. Many of the fledglings are released in Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve to boost population size.

### Recover

Genetic rescue is a possible solution to inbreeding depression. When population sizes are small, genetic diversity can become dangerously low. Scientists are encouraging interbreeding with another subspecies of Yellow-tufted Honeyeater in captivity and the wild.

### Protect

Habitat quality is improved by removing weeds and pests and planting indigenous species in Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve and surrounding properties. Providing supplementary feed when natural food availability is low also assists the birds.

### Advocate

Community education helps people understand threatened species management, raises the profile of the Helmeted Honeyeater and other threatened species, and increases the intrinsic value of habitat.



Victoria's network of parks and reserves are an integral part of Aboriginal cultural landscapes. Parks Victoria respects the deep and continuing connection that Traditional Owners have to these landscapes and recognises their ongoing role in caring for Country.



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