

Feather Fascination!

with local Birdwatcher,

Jim Butler

Blue-faced



Last evening, I watched as eight Noisy Miners harassed three Blue-faced Honeyeaters with such violence that they took refuge in the deep leafy recesses of our Golden Cane. That is unusual as the larger Blue-faced HE can be as aggressive as the Miner, but the 8/3 ratio must have been too great! The Blue-faced HE is generally regarded as nomadic rather than migratory in Brisbane. Their national distribution stretched across the top of Australia and down the entire east coast. They are mostly found in open forests and woodlands; as well as farm lands, urban parks and golf courses. The record for longevity is a bird banded in July 1998 in NSW and re-trapped in a mist net and released at the same location 9 years 1.5 months later in September 2007. The bare facial skin of birds just fledged is yellow, while the skin of birds six months and older is more greenish, before assuming the adult blue facial patch by around 16 months of age.

The Blue-faced HE (30 cm) has been in Australia for several million years and its names in three Cape York Peninsula aboriginal languages are recorded. When the First Fleeters arrived, they noted it. John Hunter, First Fleet Captain of HMS Sirius and the second NSW Governor was a keen naturalist and our National Library holds Hunter's 100 watercolour sketches of birds and plants "drawn on the spot" in 1788 - 1790. The Blue-faced HE is Number 39 in his collection which demonstrates its prevalence.

The Blue-faced HE feeds mostly on insects and other invertebrates, but also eats nectar and fruit from native and exotic plants. It forages in noisy flocks of up to seven birds mostly by sallying, although birds also probe and glean flowers and foliage. These flocks tend to exclude other birds from the feeding area, but they do associate with Little Friarbirds.

Admire the Blue...

~ Jim

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Image: Blue-faced Honeyeater
taken by Ed Frazer at Brookfield