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## SHORT NOTES

## Bellbirds feeding on sap of black beech

The Bellbird (*Anthornis melanura*), like other meliphagids, specialises in nectar feeding (e.g. Turbott 1947, Falla *et al.* Moon 1982, Soper 1984). The structure of its tongue seems particularly adapted for this purpose (McCann 1964), and the list of flowering plants on which it feeds is impressive (see esp. Merton 1966, Gravatt 1970, Falla *et al.* 1978:203, Baker 1986). Bellbirds are also known to eat fruits and berries (Turbott 1947, McCann 1964, St. Paul 1975, Falla *et al.* 1978, Norton 1980, Moon 1982, Soper 1984), insects (Turbott 1947, McCann 1964, Merton 1966, Gravatt 1970, St. Paul 1975, Falla *et al.* 1978, Gaze & Fitzgerald 1982, Moon 1982, Soper 1984), spiders (Turbott 1947), pollen (Gaze & Fitzgerald 1982, Soper 1984), and artificial foods such as sugar water and honey (Falla *et al.* 1978, Moon 1982). Bellbirds

are also one of the species known to eat honeydew extruded by mealybugs on tree trunks (Falla *et al.* 1978:203). Insofar as we have found, however, there is only one mention of Bellbirds feeding on sap (Merton 1966), and so we report a confirming observation.

On 18 December 1990, when we were recording vocalisations near the bridge over the Buller River in Nelson Lakes National Park, we observed Bellbirds clinging to and sometimes pecking gently on tree trunks. At first we thought the birds were searching for insects or feeding on honeydew, but at 0830 h we saw a female Bellbird extruding her tongue at what appeared to be a wound in the trunk of a black beech (*Nothofagus solandri*). Upon close inspection of this place about 1 m above the ground, we found viscous sap, on which a bee was feeding.

Tree sap being nutritionally related to nectar and honeydew, it is not surprising that Bellbirds utilise this food source when it is available. Merton (1966: 181) drew special attention to his two observations of Bellbirds feeding on sap: once on a whau (*Entelea arborescens*) about 1 m above ground and once on a karaka (*Corynocarpus laevigatus*) about 3 m above ground. The bird thus takes sap from trees of at least three families. Several authors report Bellbirds inspecting tree trunks and often assume the birds are searching for insects, but it seems possible they are also inspecting trees for sap oozes at ruptures caused by such factors as freezing, wind damage, and animal-inflicted wounds. Whether the Bellbird can actually pierce the bark by pecking on it, thereby causing sap to flow – as does the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus varius*), a North American woodpecker – is not known.

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