

Birds and lerps (a request for information)

If you live or birdwatch near stands of red gum eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) or certain other *Eucalyptus* spp., you may have noticed an interesting avian phenomenon in 1999: birds feeding on small, white, crystalline cones on the surfaces of eucalyptus leaves.

First detected in southern California in June 1998, the Redgum Lerp Psyllid (*Glycaspis brimblecombei*), a tiny homopteran insect whose nymphs feed, aphid-like, on juices sucked from leaves, has since migrated north into the San Francisco Bay area and the Central Valley (information for this account has been taken from various internet web sites, in particular that of the Agricultural Commissioner of Los Angeles County -- <http://acwm.co.la.us/scripts/lerpsum.htm>). The nymphs secrete a protective cone, called a "lerp," made of a white, sugary substance, as well as aphid-like "honeydew."

A wide variety of birds, ranging in size from crows to bushtits, have discovered that these nymphs and their secretions are a handy source of food. This is not too surprising, as quite a few Australian bird species feed on lerps, some making the sugary cones the mainstay of their diet (Paton, C. D., *Emu* 80:213-226, 1980). Here in California, species that are known to feed on eucalyptus nectar (e. g., wood warblers, tanagers, orioles) have taken to eating lerps in a big way. Hummingbirds appear to "lap up" the honeydew secreted by the nymphs.

With the hope of eventually producing a summary article on bird use of lerps in California, Kimball Garrett and I would greatly appreciate hearing from anyone who has witnessed this phenomenon. Any observations reported will be greatly appreciated and duly acknowledged. Please include information on the bird species involved, type of foraging behavior observed, location, date(s), and some information on the nature and condition of the vegetation, level of infestation, etc. Observations may be sent to: Tim Manolis, 808 El Encino Way, Sacramento, CA 95864 (or e-mail: YLightfoot@aol.com).