

Victoria's Riflebird feeding on *Banksia robur* floral nectar

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Abstract

An adult male Victoria's Riflebird (*Ptiloris victoriae*) was photographed feeding upon floral nectar of a Broad-leaved Banksia (*Banksia robur*). While the species mainly feeds on fruit and invertebrates, this observation corroborates recent evidence that Victoria's Riflebird feeds upon nectar opportunistically.

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Nectar feeding is alluded to, but not definitively proven, as part of the diet of some species of birds of paradise (Paradisaeidae) (Frith & Frith 2009), being specifically implicated in the Trumpet Manucode (*Phonygammus keraudrenii* (Lesson and Garnot, 1826)), Victoria's Riflebird (*Ptiloris victoriae* Gould, 1850), and Twelve-wired Bird of Paradise (*Seleucidis malanoleucus* (Daudin, 1800)) (Frith & Beehler 1998; Gregory 2019).

Victoria's Riflebird is restricted to rainforest and immediately adjacent habitats of the Australian Wet Tropics. It feeds upon fruits and invertebrates (Frith & Frith 1998; Grant & Litchfield 2003) and, rarely, floral nectar. Of 65 foraging events observed by Frith (1984), two involved the probing of flowers with the bill, suggesting nectar feeding (Frith & Beehler 1998; Frith & Frith 2009).

De Geest (2019) cited three reports of Victoria's Riflebird foraging on flowers, but none confirmed nectar feeding as opposed to the possibility of birds taking insects. He documented and illustrated a Victoria's Riflebird clearly feeding upon the floral nectar of the Blue Quandong (*Elaeocarpus grandis* F.Muell., syn. *E. angustifolius* Blume), and concluded that "nectar might occasionally be a useful addition to its diet" (De Geest 2019: 15). Gregory (2019: 233) also observed Victoria's Riflebird piercing the base of the bell-shaped flowers of the

climber *Tecomanthe* sp. Baill., "presumably in quest of nectar".

At 13:43 hrs on 18 November 2022 we closely (8.5 m) observed an adult male Victoria's Riflebird fly to a Broad-leaved (Swamp) Banksia (*Banksia robur* Cav.) (found on the eastern coastal zone of Australia, from Cooktown, north Queensland, to the Illawarra area of New South Wales but exotic in CBF's garden), perch upon the apex of an inflorescence (Fig. 1), and feed upon its nectar for several minutes, with its bill tip open (Fig. 2). An examination of the inflorescence (and two others in similar condition) revealed no insects visible to the naked eye. The plant was 5 m from the home of the first author (17° 25' S 145° 42' E) and 20 m from the surrounding rainforest edge. Despite the fact that the plant has been flowering for at least 15 years, and Victoria's Riflebirds frequently visit the garden from the adjacent rainforest, this was the first observation of the latter feeding on the former. We concur with De Geest (2019) that Victoria's Riflebird is an opportunistic, if rarely observed, nectar feeder.

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Figure 1. The adult male Victoria's Riflebird atop a *Banksia robur* inflorescence prior to feeding on its nectar. Photo: James Hammersley.



Figure 2. The adult male Victoria's Riflebird feeding upon the nectar of a *Banksia robur*. Photo: James Hammersley.

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