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Results of the 1958–1959 Gilliard New Britain Expedition 1. A New Genus of Honeyeater (Aves)

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In 1958 and early 1959 the writer and his wife made a representative collection of birds in the Whiteman Mountains, central New Britain. One honeyeater discovered near the summit of the range is so unusual that it seems necessary to erect a new genus for it.

VOSEA, NEW GENUS

DEFINITION: Size medium; general coloration dark olive-tinged, without bright ornamentation or distinct pattern; plumage rather close and compact (i.e., rump not dense and fluffy; flanks not fluffy); bill long (almost one-third of the wing and one and one-half times the depth of head), slender and curved; the maxilla not strongly ridged; forehead at base of maxilla unfeathered and swollen; feathering of lores not reaching nostril; nostril cavity much elongated, with the operculum somewhat swollen and the nostril slit-like; a narrow, dull gray, unfeathered area below and immediately behind the eye; wing with the first (outer) primary 25 to 30 mm. less than the length of the second, and the fourth, fifth, and sixth subequal and longest; tail somewhat shorter than the wing and rounded; tarsus envelope laminiplantar, with the acrotarsal surface strongly scutellated and moderately sculptured; the tarsus heavy and averaging about 25 per cent shorter than the culmen from its base.

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TYPE OF THE GENUS: *Vosea whitemanensis*, new species.

Vosea whitemanensis, new species

TYPE: A.M.N.H. No. 708117; adult male, Camp 12, Wild Dog Range, Whiteman Mountains, central New Britain; December 22, 1958; collectors, E. Thomas and Margaret Gilliard.

DESCRIPTION: Adult male, upper parts olive, more brownish olive on the upper back where the feathers are narrowly fringed with darker olive, forming indistinct scalloping; becoming somewhat paler, more yellowish olive, on lower back, rump, and upper tail coverts. Head generally dull olive-brown, with the forehead and lores more dark brownish and finely tipped with buff; a narrow unfeathered area below and behind the eye which in life is "pale gray washed with palest yellow." Sides of head with the auriculars darker olive-brown, the latter with the faintest suggestion of pale tipping; malar region, throat, chest, and sides of neck also olive-brown but with very fine light shaft striping. Elsewhere below olive-brown to brownish olive, becoming lighter, somewhat more yellowish, on the lower half of body, including shanks and under tail coverts.

Wing formula: $1 < 2 < 3 < 4, 5, 6 > 7 > 8 > 9 > 10$; $2 = 9$; the difference between 1 and 2 is about 25 mm. Wings sooty brown, with prominent yellowish olive outer edges except on the five outer primaries where the yellowish olive coloration is virtually lacking on the outer (first) primary, present on the leading edge of the basal thirds of the second and third primaries, and virtually lacking on the outer halves of the fourth and fifth primaries. Secondaries sooty olive, broadly edged on exposed surfaces with yellowish olive. Upper wing coverts and scapulars sooty brown, with the exposed outer vanes and tips yellowish olive. These edgings give the folded wing a solid yellowish olive appearance. Under wing coverts dull grayish brown washed with yellowish olive, particularly at the bend of the wing; inner wing edgings pale gray tinged with palest ochraceous.

Tail sooty brown, with the central rectrices on both vanes chiefly yellowish olive above; the remaining rectrices above with the outer vanes yellowish olive and the inner vanes sooty brown; tail below dark grayish.

Bill in life black, legs in life dark gray; iris in life dark brown.

MEASUREMENTS OF TYPE: Wing, 116 mm.; tail, 91 mm.; bill from base, 42; exposed culmen, 40; tarsus, 32.

Adult female like male but slightly smaller and duller (see measurements).

RANGE: Mt. Uali and Wild Dog Range, Whiteman Mountains (between 3500 feet and 5600 feet). Found only in the middle and upper tier of original forest. Uncommon.

DIAGNOSTIC REMARKS: Judging from general appearances, this dark, plain-colored, long-billed honeyeater probably belongs near *Melilestes* and *Melidectes*. From the former it differs by having the culmen less ridged, by having the area under and behind the eye naked, not thickly feathered, and by having the tarsal envelope laminiplantar in form, not booted. From *Melidectes* it differs by having a rounded, not graduated, tail, and by having the lateral feathering at the base of the maxilla not reaching the nostril. From both *Melilestes* and *Melidectes* it differs by lacking the dense tuft of feathers on the rump and flanks.

Vosea whitemanensis differs from *Lichmera* by being very much larger and by being unpatterned and without a trace of the contrasting white and silvery white post-ocular and/or auricular feathering usually found in *Lichmera*; by having the culmen more rounded, less ridged, by lacking the feathering covering the base of the maxilla, and by having the lateral feathering of the maxilla more restricted, not reaching the nostril; and by having a naked area under the eye which is usually lacking in *Lichmera*.

One aberrant member of the *Lichmera* group, however, requires special attention. This bird (*L. bougainvillei*), was described by Ernst Mayr (1932, p. 17) five years after its discovery in the mountain forests of Bougainville Island. Mayr wrote: "I include this isolated species rather reluctantly in the genus *Lichmera*. It lacks the silvery whitish tips to the post-auricular feathers and ear-coverts, which are so pronounced in most species of *Lichmera*. However, *bougainvillei* agrees better with *Lichmera* than with any other genus of Meliphagidae in proportions of bill, wing and tail, and in its type of coloration. The species has no character which would justify the creation of a new genus."¹ Owing to the geographical proximity of Bougainville to New Britain, it was thought that the troublesome *bougainvillei* and the new Whiteman Mountain bird might prove more nearly related to each other than either is to any other group. Such is not the case.

Lichmera bougainvillei differs from *Vosea* by being considerably smaller, by having the culmen more ridged, less rounded with a

¹ However, Mayr has called my attention to the fact that in 1950 Meise erected the monotypic genus *Stresemannia* for this bird, stating that *Guadalcanaria* is probably its closest relative.

TABLE 1
 MEASUREMENTS (IN MILLIMETERS) OF TWO MALES AND SIX FEMALES OF *Vosea whittemanensis*

	Wing	Tail	Culmen from Base	Exposed Culmen	Tarsus
Male	113, 116 ^a	89, 91 ^a	40, 42 ^a	39, 40 ^a	31, 32 ^a
Female	100, 103, 104, 105, 105, 105	80, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84	39, 740, 40, 40, 42, 42	738.5, 38, 39, 39, 39, 40	30, 31, 31, 31, 31.5, 32

^a Type.

swollen base, by having the central base of the maxilla feathered, not partially nude; by having the lateral feathering of the maxilla more expansive (reaching the nostril), and by having the tarsal envelope booted in form, not laminiplantar.

Because of certain similarities in the olive coloration of the wings and tail and in general body proportions, *Vosea whitemanensis* was compared with *Guadalcanaria inexpectata*. The Guadalcanal bird, however, differs by having highly contrasting plumage, with long, bright, orange-yellow neck tufts, the forehead and maxilla base differently formed and feathered, and the bill relatively shorter.

In conclusion, *Vosea whitemanensis* seems no more nearly related to *Guadalcanaria* than to *Melilestes*, *Melidectes*, or *Lichmera bougainvillei*. In my opinion, therefore, it should stand monotypic along with at least two other birds from the oceanic island of New Britain: *Habropteryx* and *Ortygocichla*.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This remarkable new bird is named in honor of Charles R. Vose, a generous friend of exploration who recently lost his life in Alaska.

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