

NOTES ON THE PINK AND ROSE ROBIN IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

by J. B. PATON

In August, 1967, with D. C. Paton I recorded the presence of the Rose Robin (*Petroica rosea*) at the Adelaide suburb of Beaumont⁽¹⁾, but this species was not included in H. T. Condon's *Handlist of the Birds of South Australia* (revised to August, 1968), because evidence of its identification was not considered conclusive.

On May 21, 1969, an apparently similar uncoloured robin appeared in the same garden and was seen regularly two or three times a week the last occasion being on August 18. It was about the same size as a Redcapped Robin, but its call was more sibilant and it had a very characteristic habit of twitching its tail and dropping its wings and spreading them forward. It spent a good deal of time on the lower branches of the leafless almond trees, and it was quite easy to approach it and to see the white tips to the tail feathers.

On June 28 the bird was caught in a mist net and the presence of white tips on the three outer tail feathers confirmed that it was indeed a Rose Robin⁽²⁾. In the hand the bird was similar to the one caught in 1967 except that there were no red feathers on the breast and it is assumed that this was an immature female.

On August 24, 1969, at 2030 hrs. (i.e. about 3 hrs. after sunset) a bird hit the window at the home of Mr. and Mrs. W. Rundell at Roslyn Park (about 4½ miles E. of Adelaide G.P.O. and 2½ miles N.-E. of Beaumont). This was still another immature Rose Robin (believed to be a young male) which soon recovered and was later banded and released.

This record is of particular interest because the bird was flying at night and therefore was in all probability migrating. Assuming it hit the window at right angles, it was flying in a direction just E. of ENE, i.e. towards northern Victoria, and also towards the recently risen nearly full moon. The bird hit the upper pane on the window about 12 ft. from the ground, and subsequent examination showed that at that time the light from the window (the blind was not drawn) and that from the moon

would have been in line, and could have confused the bird and caused the accident.

Little is known of the movements of land birds during migration in Australia, so the following meteorological information is included for future reference:—

Weather: Fine, clear and cloudless. Visibility 20 miles.

Wind: ENE. 5 knots at 2100 hrs. (Bureau of Meteorology).

Temp.: 60°F at 2100 hrs. (Bureau of Meteorology).

Moonrise August 25, 1508 hrs. (Full moon August 27.)

Sunset August 25, 1752 hrs.

Height above sea level approx. 475 ft. (Beaumont 500 ft.). Both are in the lower foothills of the Mt. Lofty Ranges.

These observations suggest that clear skies (for navigation?) and some moonlight (for visibility?) may be important when migration is to occur at night.

The presence of three Rose Robins near the area where Gould collected his Pink Robin (*P. rodinogaster*) in 1839 suggested that his identification should be confirmed. Gould's Australian collection is at the Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, U.S.A., and Dr. R. M. De Schauensee, Curator of Birds, has kindly examined the specimen of *Petroica* in the collection. There are no specimens of *P. rodinogaster* and the three specimens of *P. rosea* all come from N.S.W.

However the British Museum has three specimens of *P. rodinogaster* from S.A., but none of *P. rosea*. One of the Pink Robins was from the Savlin-Godman collection and its authenticity cannot be guaranteed. The other two (45.11.7 18 and 19), an adult and an immature bird were received in 1845 from Capt. (later Sir George) Grey who was at that time Governor of South Australia. No locality was given and the labels could simply mean that they were sent from, not necessarily collected in South Australia. An effort was made to trace the immature bird which still had its original label No. 26/West/16.7.83.

Although the Province of South Australia

was only six years old in 1842, at least one person was gaining an income from the sale of Natural History specimens. In the *Adelaide Examiner*⁽³⁾ at the end of 1842 several advertisements for the sale of bird skins appear including one from Thomas Anslow for "native companion, bustard, cereopsis, ibis, musk, mountain and wood Duck, two spoonbills, hawks including a white hawk, several bitterns, coots, cockatoos, pigeons, diamond wrens, blue-ruffed and green-ruffed wrens, lavender wren, satin wren, emu wren, golden wren, four kinds of robins, bee-eater, oriol goat-sucker." The birds had been prepared by a Mr. Wilson who had studied in England for nine years and were "Mainly from the River Murray and forest areas of the remote interior."

Captain Grey was a personal friend of Gould, and was always on the lookout for new material to send him. In a letter to Gould written about this time⁽⁴⁾ he refers to "specimens having been purchased," so it is possible that he bought some of Anslow's specimens. Grey also collected many specimens himself, and as he visited the S.-E. in 1842 (where the Pink Robin is more likely to be seen) it seemed possible that the British Museum birds were collected then. However the report of the trip by Thomas Burr⁽⁵⁾ specifically states that no specimens were collected.

In 1843⁽⁶⁾ Grey sent five cases of natural history specimens to U.K. on board the *Sultana* and the Taglioni and wrote to Gould that the specimens included "a variety of rare birds" and added "I have forwarded to you a descriptive catalogue of this series of numbers, and also a duplicate copy to Mr. Grey" (of the British Museum) and emphasised that "I wish one specimen of every kind that I have sent home to be presented to the British Museum." Unfortunately this catalogue does not seem to have been retained, so it is unlikely that we will ever know where these two specimens were collected. Mr. C. J. Galbraith of the British Museum kindly confirmed the identification of the birds in question.

REFERENCES

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- (5) S.A. Archives GRG 24-6-1844, 648.
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