

## EXTENSION OF RED-BREASTED BABBLER'S RANGE NOT CONFIRMED

I was a little perturbed to realize that my short note (*S. Aust. Orn.*, 1971, 25, 237) implies that an extension of range for *Pomatostomus temporalis intermedius*, a sub-species of the Grey-crowned Babbler, has been accepted without question. This is not so. None of the observers were able to get clear views of the crowns of these babblers' heads, and all concerned appreciated the possibility that the birds seen may merely have been White-browed Babblers with discoloured breasts (in both cases they were reported in red sand country).

Nevertheless, there are still many extensions of range to be recorded in South Australia, and the final paragraph "Members visiting these regions should take careful note of all babblers, and make a full description of any with reddish breasts," still stands.

R. F. BROWN.

The claim for the extension of the range of the Red-breasted Babbler (*Pomatostomus temporalis intermedius*) by R. F. Brown (*S. Aust. Orn.*, 25, 237) warrants some comment. Analysis of the record indicates that identification was based mainly on the reddish colour of the breast; and although several observers were involved, none, apparently, was prepared to publish a first-hand account of the birds. Furthermore, some literature relevant to the subject has been disregarded.

Captain S. A. White (*Emu*, 13, 26) in an account of a trip through the Gawler Ranges commented under *Pomatorhinus superciliosus* (White-browed Babbler) that the birds were numerous and seen in all types of country; then further said, 'Many birds found out on the clay country had their feathers stained such a deep red that one would imagine at first sight that they were of a distinct species.' Again, writing of a trip to the Musgrave and Everard Ranges, White (*Trans. Roy. Soc. S.A.*, 34, 751) said under *Morganornis superciliosus* (White-browed Babbler), 'Very plentiful; enjoys a great range. Many specimens were taken of a dark-red colour, caused by bathing and then fluttering in the dusty red soil.'

Having had no personal experience with the Red-breasted Babbler, I sought an opinion on the matter from S. A. Parker.

He listed several characters by which the Red-breasted Babbler might be distinguished from the White-browed in the field, but emphasised the unreliability of breast colour, saying, 'In the collection of the Arid Zone Research Institute, Alice Springs, there are several specimens of White-browed Babblers with reddish underparts. This is red dust.' He further stated that there is no clear line of demarcation on the breast of the Red-breasted Babbler, the change from whitish throat to rufous belly being gradual.

Thus the red breast and 'clear line of demarcation,' the features on which Brown's claim relied, are shown to be untrustworthy. I feel, therefore that serious ornithologists must await better-substantiated evidence before accepting the proposed extension of range.

JOHN ECKERT.