
Notes on *Ashbyia lovensis*.

By J. R. B. LOVE.

I first secured a solitary specimen of this bird at Leigh's Creek late in the year 1910. On sending the skin to Mr. E. Ashby, he at once perceived it to be a new species, in consequence of which, after some hunting, I found a small flock of about twenty of the birds inhabiting a very barren looking stony ridge near Leigh's Creek.

Two specimens were secured, one of which, when shot, ran down a rabbit burrow, dying within three feet of the entrance. This running down a rabbit burrow at first seemed to be merely a chance, but, on further acquaintance with this bird, it appears to be a distinct, though certainly very curious trait of the species.

With the three specimens before him, Mr. Ashby classed this bird with the *Ephthianurac*, naming it provisionally *Ephthianura lovensis*. Mr. A. J. North did not concur in his view that the bird is an *Ephthianura*, and named it *Ashbyia lovensis*. Their view has further been endorsed by Mr. Gregory Mathews.

While the bird may, and probably is, closely allied to *Ephthianura* morphologically, in habits it is decidedly not an *Ephthianura*, but bears a close resemblance to *Anthus Australis*. The *Ephthianurac* live in small bushes, flitting from bush to bush.

Ashbyia lovensis runs on the ground, and at the conclusion of a run, elevates and depresses the tail in the same fashion as *Anthus*. I have never seen *Ashbyia lovensis* flit from bush to bush, nor have I noticed it perched in a bush. The favourite perch is on a small stone in an area of clear ground, or upon a fence post, when it is found near a fence.

After the first three skins were secured, a small boy at Leigh's Creek caught an adult specimen of the bird, which had run down a rabbit burrow. He took it home and placed it in a cage with his canaries. The *Ashbyia lovensis* died on the following day, and the boy's mother threw away the body, which was thus lost.

This first flock soon left Leigh's Creek, and did not reappear up till the end of 1912, when I left the district.

In December, 1910, I found the bird, in twos and threes, fairly plentiful on the gibber plains between Hergott and Killalpaninna, on Cooper's Creek.

In January, 1913, while travelling overland to Darwin, my two companions and I found the bird at intervals from Lyndhurst Siding to Oodnadatta, being quite plentiful at Stewart's Creek, where several skins were obtained. Two of these have been obtained for the Adelaide Museum from Mr. E. Ashby, and a third I forward with these notes.

At Stewart's Creek I saw the bird run down a rabbit burrow on several occasions, which at first led me to wonder if the bird nested below the surface. This final point, however, was cleared up by the discovery of the nest, near Macumba, in January, 1913.

The nest was placed in a small depression in the earth, as with *Anthus*, and contained two eggs. The eggs are pyriform, midway in size between the eggs of *Ephthianura* and *Anthus*; and are white, with brown to buff spots, assuming a band near the larger end. Seen by themselves, the eggs might be mistaken for those of the Fulvous-fronted Honey-eater. These two eggs are now in the possession of Mr. A. L. Merrotsy.

We thereafter met with the bird as far North as Charlotte Waters, which was the last place at which we found it.

It has thus been found on the gibber plains of the Lake Eyre Basin to the East, South, West and North-West. The township of Leigh's Creek is on the watershed separating the Lake Eyre from the Lake Torrens basin.

The first specimens found seem to be a small flock which had strayed just to the extreme edge of the Lake Eyre basin. As *Ashbyia lovensis* was found to be numerous a few miles North of Leigh's Creek, it would seem to belong properly to the Lake Eyre basin itself.

The above notes were written and handed to the ornithologist of the S.A. Museum (Mr. F. R. Zietz), about three years ago by Mr. J. R. B. Love, who remarked that they were a few notes on *Ashbyia lovensis*.

The paper was not read at the time, but was put aside for the time being, and unfortunately has been lost sight of among other papers until a month ago, when on perusal it was found to contain descriptions of the eggs and nest, which until quite recently had not been recorded.

—Editors