

A FEMALE ROSE ROBIN IN THE MOUNT LOFTY RANGES. The range and status of the Rose Robin *Petroica rosea* in South Australia has been reviewed in depth by Reid *et al.* (1984) and more recently by Black (1997). It has been regarded as an accidental visitor to South Australia (SAOA 1980). However there have been several recently published records which could indicate that small numbers regularly occur in winter (Watkins 1983; Paton *et al.* 1984; Reid *et al.* 1984; Paton 1985; Bradley 1986; SAOA 1987; Allen 1988; Hackett and Hackett 1988; Taylor 1988; Kernot and Hocking 1992; Pedler *et al.* 1994). The origin of these birds is probably in Victoria where they breed, followed by a dispersal in autumn (Blakers *et al.* 1984). Most birds sighted in South Australia are identified as fully or partly coloured males or uncoloured immatures. Observers have been unwilling or unable to determine whether uncoloured birds are females as they are almost inseparable from immature males in the field (Reid *et al.* 1984). Three records of female birds have been reported. Two were birds which had been mist-netted near Currency Creek (35°25'S, 138°48'E) (Bradley 1986) and in Coorong National Park (36°19'S, 139°43'E) (Allen 1988), while the third was a sighting at Balhannah, c. 23 km ESE of Adelaide (Taylor 1988). The following report is of an adult female Rose Robin which was encountered in the Mount Lofty Ranges.

On 28 June 1992 at approximately 1600 h, a *Petroica* species was mist-netted in a gully below Eagle on the Hill (c. 11 km SE of Adelaide). Due to its small size, it was instantly recognised as not being a Scarlet Robin *P. multicolor* and the following description was made:

Head, back, wings and rump uniform grey-brown. Two off-white wing bars, the upper being narrow and well defined, the lower very narrow and barely distinguishable. Tail grey-brown with distinctive white pattern on outer three feathers only. Small buff to whitish patch on forehead. Whitish eye ring, especially behind eye. Throat, chest and belly lighter grey with rest of underparts tending to white. Bill dark grey with grey gape. No oral flange present. Legs dark grey with soles of feet orange.

The bird was encountered in an area of disturbed South Australian blue gum *Eucalyptus leucoxylon* with an understorey dominated by golden wattle *Acacia pycnantha*, European olive

Olea europaea and blackberry *Rubus ulmifolius*. Once the bird was released it was not sighted again.

The problem with distinguishing adult female Rose Robins from immatures has been highlighted previously (Reid *et al.* 1984). The fact that first year birds appear very similar to females in the field has led to these sightings being classified as uncoloured birds (Reid *et al.* 1984). However, with this bird in the hand, the sex was readily determined. This was due primarily to the lack of an immature-type gape and no oral flange. The gape and oral flange in immature Rose Robins (and all other *Petroica* species) is yellow (Rogers *et al.* 1990). This bird had no oral flange and a gape which was grey. It has been suggested that the yellow gape in both male and female Rose Robins is not lost until the third year (Rogers *et al.* 1990). This appears to be the case for other *Petroica* species such as Scarlet Robins and Red-capped Robins *P. goodenovii* (Rogers *et al.* 1990; Rich unpubl. data). The absence of any pink in the breast of this bird also suggests that it was in full adult plumage. The presence of a pink wash on the breast of both immature males and females has been documented (Reid *et al.* 1984; Rogers *et al.* 1990). As this bird had no pink in the breast and was sporting a grey gape, the conclusion is the bird encountered was an adult female Rose Robin. Observers who sight brown-type Rose Robins in the future should try to determine the gape colour as this could be a useful indicator in determining the age and sex of this species.

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