

A SUSPECTED REMNANT POPULATION OF WHITE-BROWED SCRUBWREN. A large ephemeral salt lake lies some 5 km SE of Ashville which, in turn, is about 30 km S of Taillem Bend. Very little scrub has been left uncleared around its margins, excepting along the south side, where a road passing along its edge has resulted in some patches of up to 50 m in width being left. In company with G.B. Ragless I visited the area on 4 September 1988 and two parties of White-browed Scrubwren *Sericornis frontalis* were located in swamp paperbark *Melaleuca halmaturorum* fringed with cutting grass *Gahnia* sp. Three days later I secured a female specimen there.

I visited the area again on 30 September 1997 with M.F. Wohlfeil and again easily located two separate parties of *Sericornis*. The whole of the scrub was not searched and other parties may well have been present, but, because of the limited amount of suitable habitat, it appeared that the total population was probably less than 50 birds. Neither the first nor the second Bird Atlas recorded the species from this area, although both included records from SE of Meningie (SAOA 1977; Paton *et al.* 1994 p. 241) which are likely to have been some 20 km S of the Ashville site. Presumably these also came from paperbark-fringed swamps or near their vicinity.

It would appear that this small apparently remnant Ashville population had remained reasonably stable for nearly a decade. All adjoining farmland has been cleared for almost 40 years except for shelter patches and this has effectively isolated the birds there, although

roadside scrub might offer a tenuous corridor of travel. But searching of the surrounds of another fairly large salt lake some 4 km to the west has not revealed any *Sericornis* there, despite it having more scrub around the margins and more numerous thickets of dense paperbark. An SAOA outing to this latter area on 30 May 1965 also failed to record *Sericornis* (SAOA 1965). Seemingly then there is virtually no movement of the species between the two areas. I have visited several of the larger scrub patches remaining in the area between the Ashville site and the Meningie-Coonalpyn road without finding any *Sericornis*. It thus seems that this small population may have survived in a minimal area of habitat without recruitment or interchange from outside for at least 30-40 years. Were this population to be eradicated by fire or other disaster the chance of recolonisation from natural areas when habitat regrew to acceptable condition would appear to be remote. Decline due to inbreeding also looms as a possible future threat to the continued existence of this population in such a tiny remnant.

REFERENCES

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