



PHOTOGRAPHS:

Top left: Uncoloured PINK ROBIN (*Petroica rodinogaster*).

From a colour transparency by D. B. Mack.

Top right: Uncoloured RED-CAPPED ROBIN (*Petroica goodenovii*).

Bottom left: Uncoloured ROSE ROBIN (*Petroica rosea*). See page 19.

From colour transparencies by J. & D. Paton.

THE PINK AND ROSE ROBINS IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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Since 1962 three new State records have been obtained of the so-called Flycatcher group of passerines, as well as confirmation of the presence of another not definitely recorded for nearly 130 years (apart from sight records).

Reports of two of these, the Leaden (1) and Satin (2) Flycatchers have already been published and this paper records the presence of the Pink and Rose Robins. The astounding thing about two of these species, the Rose Robin and Leaden Flycatcher, is that they were both caught in a mist net in a suburban garden $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles S.E. of the Adelaide G.P.O., and it is believed that Gould's specimen of the Pink Robin was probably collected in 1839 from Waterfall Gully only about a mile east of this garden.

PINK ROBIN (*Petroica rodinogaster*)

Gould visited S.A. between May and August 1839 (not 1838 as sometimes stated) and later wrote in reference to the Pink Robin—"In one instance only did I meet with it on the continent, in a steep ravine under Mt. Lofty in S.A. I shot the specimen which on dissection proved to be a young male." (3).

Since then only unconfirmed sight records have been reported from S.A. (4), (5), but no specimens have been taken. However, though primarily a Tasmanian bird it winters in substantial numbers in Victoria and occasionally breeds there.

On May 20, 1963, Max Waterman while banding with D. B. Mack at Woolly's Lake in the lower S.E. of S.A. caught two uncoloured robins in one of the mist nets in dense tea-tree surrounding the edge of the lake. At first these were thought to be Flame Robins, but as they seemed atypical, two colour transparencies were taken which on examination showed the two prominent rufous bands on the wing and the absence of white on the outside of the tail, indicating that the birds were Pink Robins. The Flame Robin (*Petroica phoenicea*) has white on the side of the tail and a white speculum on the wing.

In September of the same year another similar uncoloured robin was caught in open

savannah at Culburra in the upper S.E. of S.A. (It is worth noting that on the same stay in this area another visitor from the Eastern States, the Yellow-tipped Pardalote (*Pardalotus striatus*), a new record for South Australia, was caught and banded and a specimen obtained for the S.A. Museum (6).)

The widely different habitats in which these three robins were found supports our belief that they were migrating.

ROSE ROBIN (*Petroica rosea*)

The Rose Robin is primarily a bird of southern Queensland and northern New South Wales but its range extends to Victoria and it has been known to breed in the Otway Peninsula west of Melbourne. In Queensland it breeds mainly in the rain forests and in the autumn and winter moves into open forest country and is often found in suburban gardens or far from its nesting haunts. No specimens have been taken in S.A.

Towards the last week of August, 1967, a small uncoloured robin was seen first by David Paton in the garden at 1 Dashwood Road, Beaumont. Superficially this looked like a female Red-capped Robin (*P. goodenovii*), and since this species used to breed in this garden up until the 1930s, no particular effort was made to look at the bird carefully in the field. On August 24, however, the bird was caught in a mist-net and we were surprised to find that there was no suggestion of a red or tan cap, but the head was grey-brown with a small off-white patch on the forehead, and the breast had a few bright magenta pink feathers (between Tyrian Rose and Rose Red in Ridgeway's Colour Standard). It was an immature bird still with traces of a yellowish gape and was presumably a young male. In general appearance it looked most like a female Rose Robin in Mathew's *Birds of Australia* (7), except for the magenta pink feathers which matched those of the male bird, and the browner back. Unfortunately Mathews does not give any description of the immature male Rose Robin.

Because we (J.P. and D.P.) were un-

familiar with the Flame Robin in the hand, and because there are no known records of the Rose Robin in S.A. we at first assumed that this must somehow be a Flame Robin. Photographs were taken and the bird banded and released.

Examination of skins at the S.A. Museum collection convinced us that it was not a Flame Robin, which is in any case a much bigger bird. The absence of head colour ruled out the Red-capped Robin, while the white on the tail and the wrong wing pattern eliminated the Pink Robin, and we were left with the only alternative of a Rose Robin.

At our request the colour slides were examined by Dr. Alan Lendon and then sent to Mr. Claude Austin who confirmed the identification stating that it was a typical immature male Rose Robin. We are grateful for their help and that of Mr. H. T. Condon, Curator of Birds, S.A. Museum.

Other particulars of this bird include:—gape, trace yellow; pale yellowish orbital ring extending towards the bill; a small cream patch on the forehead; chin pale grey (paler than the head); cream on the outer edge of the flight feathers towards the tip and a cream band near the base; all but the centre tail feathers obliquely tipped white and outside tail feather white; legs dull brown, toes yellow; weight 10 gms; length 120 mm. (by comparison four Red-capped Robins were 8-8.5 gms. 120 mm., 17 Scarlet Robins were 11-18 gms. (mostly 13-15 gms.), 125-140 mm.).

We left Beaumont the next day (August 26) and the bird has not been seen since our return on September 4.

It is worth putting on record that since about 1945 we have seen neither the Scarlet nor the Red-capped Robins at Beaumont, though prior to that both species used to breed here. The only exception was the appearance of a small uncoloured robin in the garden over a period of two or three weeks in May 1966, and believed at the time to be a young Red-capped Robin although colour on the head was not apparent.

COMMENT

It now appears that occasionally the Pink and Rose Robins do occur as migrants in South Australia, and that, as with the Flame Robin, these are mainly uncoloured birds. Although it is commonly believed that Gould's record of the Pink Robin near Mount

Lofty was a coloured male, he states that *on dissection* it proved to be a young male Pink Robin. Most South Australians have had little opportunity of studying either of these two species and in the field would therefore be likely to record them as the more common Flame Robin.

Our experience emphasises the value of mist-netting for confirming identifications, the need for more careful and critical field examination and for comprehensive field guides.

That the first record of two different flycatchers should come from the same Adelaide suburban garden must surely indicate that their presence elsewhere has been overlooked and that the young flycatcher tends to move considerable distances from its parental area. If the movement of these species into S.A. is not a regular occurrence, then, apart from freak weather at the time of migration, two other factors might influence the extent of migration. First, exceptionally dry conditions in the birds' usual haunts so that young birds have to forage further afield and second, exceptionally good breeding conditions so that more young are reared, and over a longer period causing over-crowding, or subjecting the later broods to different weather conditions. Perhaps the recent droughts in N.S.W. and Victoria have been in part responsible for unusually extensive movements of these birds. It is more of a coincidence that Gould in his introduction to his *Handbook to the Birds of Australia* mentions 'the parched plains of the interior during the severe drought of 1838-39.'

Photographs of uncoloured birds of three species of Robin, the Pink, Rose and Red-capped, are reproduced on page 2.

REFERENCES

1. Paton, D. C., *Emu*, 64 (1965), 320.
2. Condon, H. T., *S. Aust. Ornith.*, 24 (1965), 71.
3. Gould, J., *Handbook to the Birds of Australia*, 1 p. 276 as quoted by J. B. Cleland in *The Emu*, 36 (1937), p. 203.
4. McGilp, J. N., *S. Aust. Ornith.*, 17 (1945), 81.
5. Thomas, D. A. G., *Ibid* 19 (1948), 5.
6. Waterman, M. H., and H. T. Condon, *Emu*, 64 (1965), 298.
7. Mathews, G. M., *Birds of Australia*, 8 p. 82.

EDITOR'S NOTE

It is of interest that on the same day that the Rose Robin was captured at Beaumont (August 24, 1967), David Williams saw a male robin at Darwent's Waterhole (25 m. south of Keith on the

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Naracoorte road). He took a full description, including notes on behaviour, thinking that it was a Pink Robin. However, on checking his written observations against the literature on his return to Adelaide, he realised that his description fitted the Rose Robin only. (Reference: *S.A.O.A. Newsletter*, December 1967, p. 12.)