

THE PINK ROBIN IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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INTRODUCTION

The Pink Robin *Petroica rodinogaster* is a bird of the damp gullies of the wet sclerophyll forests of Tasmania and southern Victoria, where it feeds near the ground amongst shrubs and undergrowth. Though some birds appear to be sedentary, towards winter others move into dry sclerophyll forest and more open areas, and some Tasmanian birds winter in Victoria. The Pink Robin was first found in A.C.T. in the Brindabella Ranges in the winter of 1962, since when it has been seen in succeeding winters, and banding has shown the population to be remarkably constant (Frith 1969). Perhaps these unobtrusive birds were overlooked before; but another explanation is that this small overwintering population is a recent arrival, perhaps forced away from its usual haunts by a loss of habitat. There is only one record from Queensland, a male Pink Robin

seen near Pittsworth in July 1971 (Temple-Watts, 1971).

There is no doubt that Pink Robins have found their way in to South Australia from time to time, and a list of recorded observations is given (Table 1). With the exception of Rowley's given below, these are all casual records and they suggest a rare and irregular movement into South Australia in the late autumn. Two of these observations, both late last century, are of doubtful value as they were first reported forty or fifty years after the observations were made and give no other details. They are included in the table only to complete the review.

RECENT RECORDS FROM SOUTH-EAST

On 31 May 1976, Dulcie Rowley first saw a Pink Robin in a patch of bush approximately 10 km NW of Mt Schank. It was in stunted

Observer	Year	Season	Sex/Plumage	Place	Habitat	Reference
Gould	1839	prob. June	uncoloured male	"under Mt. Lofty" ? Waterfall Gully	deep ravine	Gould, J.
Pulleine	"about 1882"		? 1 bird	Mt. Lofty Ranges near Adelaide		Pulleine, R. H. 1933
Morgan	"between 1885-90"		? 1 bird	Mt. Lofty		Sutton, J. 1923
Donovan	before 1927	various occ. over a number of years		Glenelg River S.A. Section	thickly wooded river banks	Ashby, E. 1927
McGilp	1945	May 30	Male	Nangwary, S.E.	roadside vegetation between pines and thick gum forest.	McGilp, 1945
Thomas	1948	April 18	Male	Bridgewater, Mt. Lofty Ranges	steep, rocky slopes, densely vegetated with blackberries, gorse and broom.	Thomas, 1948
Waterman	1963	May 20	2 uncoloured one banded 010.70833	Woolly's Lake, S.E.	dense Teatree <i>Melaleuca sp.</i>	Paton <i>et al.</i> 1968
Waterman	1963	Sept. 12	1 uncoloured banded — 010.71141	Culburra S.E.	open savannah	Paton <i>et al.</i> 1968
Rowley	1976	May 31-Aug. 16	1 uncoloured	Mt. Schank S.E.	stunted stringybark with bracken under-storey	Rowley 1978
Rowley	1977	April 26-Aug. 3	as above	as above	as above	Rowley 1978
Rowley	1978	April 9	as above	as above	as above	Rowley 1978

fairly open Messmate Stringybark *Eucalyptus obliqua* and bracken fern. This is an isolated area of scrub of about 20 ha. Between that date and 16 August 1976 the bird was observed on many occasions by D. R. and on a few by other people. Several times it approached to within one-two metres of its observers. As seen from two metres it was a dark brown robin similar in size to a Scarlet Robin *Petroica multicolor* but plumper, with two very prominent buff-orange bars on its wings. There was no white on the forehead, wings or tail. The underparts were paler than the back with grey sides to the chest. The bill and legs were black. No call was heard.

In 1977 either the same bird or a similar one came to the same patch of scrub. D.R. first observed it on 26 April 1977. On 21 May 1977 Joan Paton saw it and confirmed the identification as that of a Pink Robin. It was last seen on 13 August, but no observations were made between then and 10 September. In both years the birds in question appeared and disappeared at about the same time as the Flame Robin *Petroica phoenicea*.

On 9 April 1978 an uncoloured Pink Robin — perhaps the same bird — was seen in the same area of Messmate at about the same time as a Scarlet Robin was seen in a nearby garden, but some days before Flame Robins were seen in the district.

COMMENT

We can, I believe, assume that Gould's specimens collected "in a deep ravine under Mt. Lofty" was from Waterfall Gully where there is still an appropriate habitat of Teatree *Lepidospermum pubescens* in the upper reaches.

Then all but one of the South Australian records have been in areas of low rather dense vegetation such as teatree, bracken or gorse with some taller shrubs, areas where it would not be

easy to see the bird. Nevertheless, if the robins had been more regular visitors it seems unlikely that they would have been consistently overlooked. The exception was an uncoloured bird caught and banded by Waterman in September 1963 in open savannah — the only record for the latter part of the year — and presumably of a bird in transit to its summer quarters.

The observations from Mt. Schank are therefore of considerable interest, since a Pink Robin has over-wintered in the same area on three consecutive years. As with the Brindabella birds, it is impossible to say whether Pink Robins have always over-wintered here or whether this is a recent habit. The fact of the appearance of this bird each autumn at about the same time as the Scarlet *P. multicolor* or Flame Robins *P. phoenicea* suggests that the occasional Pink Robin may get caught up with flocks of the more numerous species; or perhaps the same factors may precipitate a movement of all three species in the same direction. A careful search in appropriate habitat for this quiet and unobtrusive bird in the south-east of S.A. in autumn and winter might well prove very rewarding.

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