

## FEMALE LEADEN FLYCATCHER IN THE ALDINGA SCRUB

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### INTRODUCTION

The main range of the Leaden Flycatcher *Myiagra rubecula* is in the northern parts of Western Australia and the Northern Territory, eastern Queensland and eastern New South Wales (Reader's Digest 1976). It is described as rather rare in Victoria (Wheeler 1979) and a vagrant to Adelaide, South Australia (Reader's Digest *op. cit.*). Its habitat varies from riverside vegetation, mangroves and swamp woodlands in the north to open eucalypt forests, woodlands, coastal scrubs and dense forest gullies elsewhere (Pizzey 1980). Reid and Cox (1978) reviewed the South Australian status of this species and that of the similar Satin Flycatcher *M. cyanoleuca*. Only one confirmed record of a Leaden Flycatcher, that of a male at Beaumont, Adelaide (Paton 1965) was given. We are not aware of any other authenticated records of this species in South Australia.

### THE RECORD

On 2 November 1981 at 0830 on a cloudless morning in the south-western area of the Aldinga Scrub our attention was taken by a female-type *Myiagra* flycatcher.

The Scrub is a 200 ha area of dune scrub, 50 km south of Adelaide at the southern end of the Adelaide Plains. The habitat in the immediate vicinity of the sighting was dry sclerophyll woodland comprising Pink Gum *Eucalyptus fasciculosa*, *Banksia marginata*, *Xanthorrhoea semiplana* and with an undercover mainly of Bracken Fern *Pteridium esculentum* and grasses.

We had largely unobscured views of the bird for eight minutes at a distance of eight to ten metres, the bird itself being approximately two metres above the ground. The size of a Grey Fantail *Rhipidura fuliginosa*, the bird had a dull leaden-grey colour to its crown, nape and upper back region, being darker on the face. Otherwise, it was pale grey-brown above. Below, the throat and upper breast were pale buff-orange shading into a dull white abdomen and undertail-coverts. The bill was black and the eye dark with a narrow pale grey periorbital ring visible only in direct sunlight. The bird made several short flights. Its stance was noticeably upright and its flights rather slow and direct. On landing, the tail vibrated up and down with a little swinging sideways. It was not seen to feed. The bird called a rather soft and short 'zzirrp' once, two of these notes twice and three of them once. When a Striated Thornbill *Acanthiza lineata* perched

nearby, the Flycatcher markedly raised the feathers of the back of its crown.

We are familiar with the female *M. rubecula* from observations in the Northern Territory, Queensland and New South Wales but as we were unfamiliar with the female *M. cyanoleuca* and Broad-billed Flycatcher *M. ruficollis*, we examined skins of the three species in the South Australian Museum. This confirmed the identification of the bird described above as *M. rubecula* in female plumage for the following reasons:

1. Size. It resembled the smaller *M. rubecula*.
2. Plumage. Above: It had the dull leaden grey colour on the crown, nape and upper back contrasting with a darker face, the colour of these parts in *M. cyanoleuca* and *M. ruficollis* being both darker and blue grey without a darker face and, in *M. cyanoleuca*, somewhat glassy. Below: It had pale buff-orange on the throat and upper breast shading into a dull white abdomen; the other species show a darker buff-orange chest not shading into a whiter abdomen but with a more contrasting appearance. The outer feathers of the tail of *M. ruficollis* are margined white.

Whilst skins of immature *M. cyanoleuca* and *M. ruficollis* were not examined, we can find no description in the literature suggesting that these would show a leaden grey crown, nape and upper back. Reid and Cox (*op. cit.*) stated that the orbital ring tends to be more prominent in *M. cyanoleuca* and possibly not always observable in *M. rubecula*. (In our sighting this ring was narrow and visible in direct sunlight).

Pizzey (1980) noted that immature *M. rubecula* are like the adult females but their wing feathers and tail are edged buffish and they are mottled across the upper breast. The *M. rubecula* individual at Aldinga did not have these features and so we believe our sightings to have been of a female.

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