

THE PEACH-FACED LOVEBIRD IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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The Peach-faced Lovebird *Agapornis roseicollis* is a popular cage bird which occurs naturally in dry savanna near water in south-western Africa (Forshaw 1977), where it may be a pest in some grain-growing areas (Long 1981). It is a short-tailed, yellowish green parrot with salmon-pink cheeks, throat and upper breast and a blue rump and is quite unlike any Australian parrot. It is now being seen with increasing frequency in the wild in South Australia where it sometimes presents problems in identification for the bird-watcher.

In the mid-1960s a small feral colony of this lovebird was said to be in Perth, Western Australia (Long 1981) but it disappeared a few years later. In South Australia, there have been unpublished reports of single birds from the Adelaide metropolitan area over many years. JBP saw one in the Beaumont area in the early 1970s. It was captured and placed in an aviary. J. Menz (pers. comm.) saw one in *Eucalyptus microcarpa* at Eden Hills on 15 November 1980. D. Barrington (pers. comm.) between 1981 and 1984 caught three near Bridgewater, 20 km SE of Adelaide. Two of these died shortly after capture. He has also been told of a number of other lovebirds seen or captured recently in suburban Adelaide.

In July 1977, C. Garrett sent to the South Australian Museum a Peach-faced Lovebird (SAM reg. no. B 30984) that had been killed by a cat on a farm two kilometres south of Arno Bay, Eyre Peninsula. At the time, the species was kept at Arno Bay but not on the particular farm in question. Garrett (pers. comm.) has also seen at least three feral birds at Whyalla in the last seven years. It would thus seem that this species commonly escapes from aviaries.

The following two reports show that these birds are capable of surviving in the wild in South Australia for at least some months. Although there have been no confirmed reports of breeding there is little doubt that the species' environmental requirements could be met in southern South Australia.

Between March and May 1981, six Peach-faced Lovebirds were seen on a farm near Midgee, north of Cowell, Eyre Peninsula (J. Ramsey, pers. comm.). One of these was chased by a small hawk and flew into the cabin of a tractor for protection and would not leave. It remained in the tractor for about three hours before it was handled. It died that night. This

specimen was sent to the South Australian Museum (reg. no. B 36351) and was later examined for internal parasites (see Mawson 1985). A flock of five birds, possibly the same flock, was seen in the same vicinity in September 1981, but has not been seen since. Neither the current nor the previous owner of the farm has kept lovebirds.

On 15 January 1984, K. Heyne of the South Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service was informed that four *A. roseicollis* had been seen on a fence around a dairy at Yankalilla in the Mount Lofty Ranges 65 km SSE of Adelaide. We have found that three of these birds had escaped from a cage on a nearby property in November 1983 and that the fourth bird had been purchased and released because it was thought that the odd bird of the trio would be 'lonely'. On 17 January 1984, two of these birds were located by officers of the National Parks and Wildlife Service and shot. (Because of the failure of the deep-freeze unit in which the specimens were stored, they were not examined for internal parasites — see Mawson 1985.) The other two birds had been retrapped by a private individual and placed in an aviary on or about 10 January 1984. *A. roseicollis* has not been reported from the Yankalilla area since then.

In January 1984, the South Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service placed this species on the list of "controlled" species in the hope of stemming the number of aviary escapees and reducing the risk of the formation of feral populations. A controlled species cannot be released from captivity without a permit.

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