

FIRST RECORD OF THE SLENDER-BILLED THORNBILL FROM THE SOUTH-EAST OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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In south-eastern South Australia, the Slender-billed Thornbill *Acanthiza iredalei* is known by published report south to the Salt Creek district (Sutton 1930), the Coombe district (Harvey 1929 a, b), Mount Rescue Conservation Park (Close 1982) and Bunn's Bore (Ragless in Glover 1968), all on the Ninety-Mile Plain. Further south in the same region the species has also been recorded 18 km north-west of Padthaway (six specimens collected in dense sclerophyllous heath, 3-4 March 1980 by J.B. Cox and N.C.H. Reid, B33698-33703). Until recently however, there have been no reports from the South-East (Parker & Reid 1982).

On 24 November 1981, J.M. Bourne, P.J. Cockerham and I visited Big Heath Conservation Park in the South-East 22 km south-west of Naracoorte. There we noted extensive tracts of heath that appeared suitable for *A. iredalei*, though during our brief traverse we saw no individuals of this species. In the course of preparations for a survey of this Conservation Park in February 1983 (Paton 1983), I therefore suggested that the survey team keep a special lookout for this thornbill. In the event the team encountered it on two of their five visits (Paton 1983: 82) and obtained two specimens:

B37171, imm. unsexed, 2 Feb. 1983, collected by N.C.H. Reid, from group of about eight birds with at least three Brown Thornbills *A. pusilla*, in heath of *Melaleuca uncinata*, *Leptospermum juniperinum* and *Hakea nodosa* with scattered patches of taller *Eucalyptus fasciculosa* and *Banksia marginata* nearby. B37066, ad. unsexed, 5 Feb. 1983, collected by J.M. Bourne and N.C.H. Reid, from 'flock of thornbills', in heath of *Melaleuca neglecta* and *Gahnia trifida* with scattered taller *Hakea rugosa* and *leptospermum juniperinum*.

Big Heath Conservation Park is about 70 km south-south-east of the heathland 18 km north-west of Padthaway (which has since been cleared for farming). The specimens from both localities proved referable to the subspecies recorded previously from the Ninety-Mile Plain, *A. i. hedleyi* Mathews, 1912 (type-locality Meningie). Those from north-west of Padthaway have been prepared as skeletons, and the two from Big Heath as study skins.

Attiwill (1972), in a comprehensive list of the

birds of Big Heath Conservation Park based on numerous visits over many years, made no mention of *A. iredalei*, but did list the very similar Buff-rumped Thornbill *A. reguloides*. Paton (1983 and pers. comm.) recorded both species, *A. iredalei* in the heath and *A. reguloides* in the stands of taller eucalypt woodland. This ecological separation of the two species has also been noted at Bunn's Bore (G.B. Ragless and H.J. Eckert pers. comm., see also Hatch 1977: 168) and Mount Rescue Conservation Park (Close 1982). The heath in big Heath Conservation Park has recently undergone a marked increase in height and extent, probably a consequence of the diversion of floodwaters away from the Park by the completion of Drain M in 1967 (Paton 1983: 3, 12-13). Possibly *A. iredalei* has occupied Mount Rescue Conservation Park only since this recent increase in the heath, which could explain why Attiwill (1972) failed to record it before 1972.

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