

WESTERN RECORDS OF THE MALLEE EMU-WREN *STIPITURUS MALLEE*. Eckert (1977) and Blakers *et al.* (1984) gave the South Australian range of the Mallee Emu-wren *Stipiturus mallee* as an area bounded by Nadda, Peebinga, Pinnaroo and Comet Bore, with an early specimen record to the south-west at Coombe. Reports of emu-wrens from further west in the Meningie district have been attributed to the Southern Emu-wren *S. malachurus* (Eckert 1977).

New records:

1. In the late afternoon of 19 July 1986, two groups of emu-wrens were located in the south-east of Carcuma Conservation Park, 25 km NE of Coonalpyn. The site was a sandy flat vegetated by heath up to 1.5 m high, dominated by the green tea-tree *Leptospermum coriaceum*, silver broom *Baeckea behrii*, common fringe-myrtle *Calytrix tetragona*, desert banksia *Banksia ornata*, dwarf sheoak *Allocasuarina pusilla* and yacca *Xanthorrhoea caespitosa*. Clumps of *Triodia irritans* were present in a small area, although emu-wrens were not observed among them.

Emu-wrens were located by their high pitched 'see see' calls, and at least two adult males were observed as close as three metres for several minutes. The following description was obtained:

Forehead and crown orange-brown and unstreaked, contrasting with grey-brown, darker streaked dorsum. Throat, lores, supercilium and ear-coverts pale blue, the latter streaked dark blue and white. Underparts pale grey-brown, merging to a paler abdomen. Tail long and filamentous.

2. From 12 to 14 October 1991, several groups of emu-wrens were located by various observers in heath 35 km ESE of Coonalpyn during the South Australian Ornithological Association campout. This locality is approximately 7 km from the western boundary of Ngarkat Conservation Park and 12 km SE of record 1. Adult males were seen in three different areas of heath by A. Lees and G. Carpenter, enabling the blue ear-coverts and unstreaked rufous crowns to be clearly seen. The vegetation at this locality was similar to that described for record 1. Superb and Variegated fairy-wrens *Malurus cyaneus* and *M. lamberti* also frequented the areas inhabited by the emu-wrens.

The colour of the ear-coverts, a feature clearly illustrated in recent field guides, identifies the male emu-wrens observed as *S. mallee*. Accompanying uncoloured birds also had unstreaked crowns, but could not be reliably identified by this feature (Eckert 1977). As none of the buzzing insect-like 'zit-zit' calls often given by *S. malachurus* (pers. obs.) were heard, their absence may also assist identification.

These records suggest that *S. mallee* is thinly distributed within the larger areas of *A. pusilla* and *B. ornata* heath throughout the Ninety-mile Desert. Much of this area is reserved within Ngarkat Conservation Park, but has not been thoroughly surveyed because access is difficult. Hatch (1977) also recorded *S. mallee* in heath within the park at Comet Bore, approximately 60 km E of our records, where *Triodia* and *A. pusilla* are more extensive. Since large-scale wildfires often occur in this region, the conservation status of these populations is uncertain.

According to Specht (1972, figs 127 & 128), sandplain heath as a dominant vegetation type extends south-westwards from Comet Bore to south of Coonalpyn, near Tintinara. Before extensive clearance for agriculture in the Tintinara district similar heath would have occurred close to *Melaleuca brevifolia* and *Gahnia* spp. wet heath, a favoured habitat of *S. malachurus* (Eckert 1977; pers. obs.). This may account for the sympatry in the nearby Coombe district indicated by Eckert (1977).

REFERENCES

- Blakers, M., Davies, S. J. J. F. and Reilly, P. N. 1984. *The Atlas of Australian Birds*. RAOU and Melbourne University Press, Melbourne.
- Eckert, J. 1977. The distribution of the emu-wrens *Stipiturus malachurus* and *S. ruficeps mallee* in South Australia. *South Australian Ornithologist*, 27, 186-187.
- Hatch, J. H. 1977. The birds of Comet Bore (Ninety-mile Plain). *South Australian Ornithologist*, 27, 163-172.
- Specht, R. L. 1972. *The vegetation of South Australia*. 2nd edn. Govt. Printer, Adelaide.
- G. Carpenter: 3 Lindsay Tce, Belair, S.A. 5052
J. Matthew: 20 Trimmer Tce, Unley, S.A. 5061

Received: May 1992