

AN ADDITIONAL RECORD OF THE RED-LORED WHISTLER FROM THE NORTHERN MURRAY MALLEE. Whilst on a field trip to the Bookmark Biosphere Reserve (which incorporates Calperum and Chowilla Stations as well as Danggali Conservation Park) on 10 August 1994, the authors observed a single male Red-lored Whistler *Pachycephala rufogularis* perched approximately 1.5 m above the ground in a mallee tree. Although the area is well known for Gilbert's Whistlers *P. inornata* (S. Williams pers. comm.), the bird observed was clearly distinguishable from this species by the presence of an orange abdomen and lores. The bird remained perched in the tree for approximately two minutes producing a distinctive, clearly audible whistle in a three note range comparable with that described in Pizzey (1991). The bird then left the mallee and began to forage in the low shrubs (<1 m tall) and the ground-flora layer of the vegetation. The bird was observed at a distance of about 15–25 m for a further three minutes as it foraged at ground level. In between foraging efforts, the whistler remained more or less stationary for up to 15 seconds before changing locations by hopping along the ground, flying up a short distance (up to 5 m), or by a combination of both methods.

The vegetation in which the bird was observed was similar to Shallow Sand Mallee as defined in nearby areas of north-west Victoria by Cheal and Parkes (1989), although comparisons can also be drawn with the *Eucalyptus dumosa*–*Beyeria lechenaultii*–*Triodia* Alliance as defined by Sparrow (1989) for South Australian mallee vegetation communities. The vegetation community was composed of a tall, fairly open shrub stratum dominated by white mallee *Eucalyptus dumosa* and beaked red mallee *E. socialis*. The understorey was also open and contained umbrella bush *Acacia ligulata*, hard-leaf wattle *A. sclerophylla*, Wilhelm's wattle *A. wilhelmiana* and pale turpentine bush *Beyeria lechenaultii*. The ground layer contained sparse porcupine bush *Triodia scariosa* tussocks with clearly 'broken down' centres and a high proportion of bare ground. The site was on the north facing side of an east-west orientated dune close to the dune crest on which a track was located. It was estimated that it was more than 40 years since the last fire (B. Lambie pers. comm.).

The vegetation in which the bird was observed was similar to approximately 30 year old mallee where one of us (IS) had seen the species previously

in Murray-Sunset National Park 38 km SSE of Werrimull. At this location, the differences in community structure were a more dense shrub layer primarily composed of *Acacia wilhelmiana* and the presence of a greater density of *Triodia scariosa* tussocks in the ground layer. Other sightings in Murray-Sunset National Park south of Settlement Road over the past 10 years have mostly occurred in younger mallee regrowth up to 15 years post-fire (Phil Pratt pers. comm.). Most of these latter sightings (over 20 in number) have occurred in regenerating Chenopod Mallee (Cheal and Parkes 1989) in the red swales of the prevailing east-west dune system. These areas are dominated by acorn mallee *Eucalyptus oleosa* and yorrell *E. gracilis*, although square-fruited mallee *E. calycogona* and *E. dumosa* may also be present. The ground layer of these communities typically comprises chenopod shrubs and sub-shrubs from genera such as *Maireana*, *Sclerolaena* and *Chenopodium*. Species from genera outside the Chenopodiaceae such as *Westringia*, *Zygophyllum*, *Ptilopus* and *Stipa* are normally also present.

Detailed observations by Woinarski (1987) show Red-lored Whistlers as occurring over much of the Big Desert in Mallee Heath vegetation communities (see Cheal and Parkes 1989) although never at high densities. Age classes of vegetation post-fire in Woinarski's study were mostly 5–30 years which compare favourably with the Murray-Sunset National Park observations of Phil Pratt (unpubl. data).

The observation of the bird at Calperum is significant in that it provides an additional record of this nationally vulnerable species (Garnett 1992) from the northern Murray Mallee of South Australia. The site at which the bird was seen (NATMAP Chowilla 7030: 627587) is 27 km NW of Calperum Homestead. This is about 30 km SSE from a 1978 observation (Pedler 1982), 30 km SE from an observation by C.E. Rix (reported in Eckert 1972), 39 km ESE of a sighting in October 1970 by Eckert (Eckert 1972) and 10 km NE of an unpublished record from April 1993 (J. Matthew pers. comm.).

Red-lored Whistlers have now been observed over a wide area of the three largest remaining blocks of mallee vegetation in south-eastern Australia (viz. the Big Desert, Murray-Sunset National Park and the Bookmark Biosphere Reserve). Aside from the preliminary work by Woinarski which was primarily conducted in the Mallee heath of the Big Desert, detailed information on the ecology of the species in drier

Mallee areas of Murray-Sunset National Park and the Bookmark Biosphere Reserve is lacking.

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