

## Nesting of the Scarlet Robin on Yorke Peninsula.

The Scarlet Robin, *Petroica boodang*, occurs in woodland and forest throughout south-eastern and south-western Australia (Higgins and Peter 2002). In South Australia the species occurs from the South East north along the Coorong to the Mount Lofty and southern Flinders Ranges (north to Dutchman's Stern), on Kangaroo Island and on southern Eyre and Yorke Peninsulas (Condon 1969). Souter (1942) reported that in the central part of Yorke Peninsula, Scarlet Robins were "occasionally seen from autumn until early spring". Daley (1961) observed a male "in a tea-tree swamp" at Pondalowie Bay (Innes National Park) on 4 September 1960. Jarman (1940) reported only Red-capped Robins, *P. goodenovii* in the vicinity of Warooka on southern Yorke Peninsula during several spring visits in the 1930s. Paton (1973) considered Scarlet Robins to be a rare vagrant to southern Yorke Peninsula woodlands. Subsequently there have been several reports of small numbers in the far south-west of Yorke Peninsula, in and between Innes National Park and Warrenben Conservation Park (e.g. Swaby 1977, Reid in Bransbury 1984; SAOA and O'Loughlin in Carpenter 2003, pers. obs.).

From 1-4 October 2004 I assisted on a biological survey of Warrenben Conservation Park conducted by the Field Naturalists Society of SA. While searching for birds at about 0730 hrs on 3 October, I observed a pair of Scarlet Robins near the southern boundary of the park (35° 08' 4"S, 137° 01' 37"E). The immediate habitat comprised Red Mallee, *Eucalyptus oleosa* and Kingscote Mallee, *E. rugosa* open scrub – low open forest (6-8 m high) over Dryland Tea-tree, *Melaleuca lanceolata* (3-4 m) and scattered Cockie's Tongue, *Templetonia retusa* and Mallee Wreath

Wattle, *Acacia triquetra* in the understorey, over prominent leaf litter. A pair of robins was flushed near the ground along an old vehicle track. After a few minutes the female flew to a low branch in a Red Mallee about 4 m high. It sat in a well-camouflaged cup-shaped nest in a vertical fork of four branches of about 4cm diameter. It then shuffled and appeared to adjust material around the edge of the nest with its bill before flying off.

After a few minutes the male robin made a scolding call nearby and it chased off a male Golden Whistler, *Pachycephala pectoralis*. The observations suggested that the robins were at an early stage of nesting but it is not known whether eggs were present. Unfortunately I was unable return to the site in order to determine the outcome of the nest and confirm breeding.

Later on 3 October I observed two other pairs of Scarlet Robins in similar habitat in the centre of the park. In one pair the male was calling frequently and chasing the female suggesting breeding behaviour, although no nest was located. Another male was observed in more open Coastal White Mallee, *E. diversifolia* and Drooping Sheoak, *Allocasuarina verticillata* low woodland in the northern part of the park on 4 October.

These observations and the few previous records provide evidence that there is a small resident population of Scarlet Robins in the far south-west of Yorke Peninsula, where sheltered tall mallee and possibly tea-tree vegetation associations with a dense canopy but relatively open understorey provide breeding habitat. Their status elsewhere on the peninsula is unknown, or whether they were ever linked to a population in the Mount Lofty Ranges. The intervening habitat has been extensively cleared, particularly the taller mallee and Mallee Box, *E. porosa* woodlands that occurred on the wetter and more fertile "leg" of Yorke Peninsula. Souter's (1942) comments suggest that the Scarlet

Robin was a visitor to central Yorke Peninsula (Maitland district), which could relate to post-breeding dispersal from either direction. This species does not tend to undertake such long-distance movements as other *Petroica* robins (Higgins and Peter 2002), with birds generally only dispersing into adjacent more open habitats in autumn-winter.

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