

Order Accipitriformes, Family Muscicapidae, Genus
Petroica—Petroica Multicolor (Scarlet-breasted
Robin).

—By S. A. White, C.M.B.O.U., C.F.A.O.U.—

Description—Male: All upper surface, black; forehead, white; wings, blackish brown, the outer feathers dark brown, secondaries marked with white; tail, dark brown, in some cases almost black, the two outside feathers marked with white obliquely, the remaining feathers are marked with white on the outer webs; under wing coverts, white; breast, bright scarlet; throat, black; lower part of abdomen, white; eyes, brown; feet and bill, black.

Female.—All upper surface, brown; wings, brown, quill feathers marked on outer webs with white; tail, brown, outer feathers almost all white, the remainder edged with white; white spot on forehead; throat, greyish brown; breast, tinged with scarlet; under tail coverts and abdomen, white; eyes, brown; feet and legs, dark brown; bill, dark brown.

Immature—The young birds have a mottled appearance due to the general greyish brown colour with darker marking down the centre of the feathers; the wing feathers are edged with buff and the inner webs white; tail, dark brown; outer

feathers, almost white, others tipped with white; throat and under surface, grey, shading into white on the abdomen.

Distribution.—The greater part of Australia and Tasmania and the type came from Norfolk Island and described by Gosselin.

Habitat.—The birds are to be found in the open forest country as well as in the fairly thick brush of the ranges and they rather like the orchards of the settlers, where they do much good in destroying many moths and grubs harmful to the fruit culture. In the autumn these birds very often come out upon the Adelaide plains and remain in the gardens for several weeks, but seldom stay more than two or three months.

Habits.—If not molested become very confiding, watching the gardener from a twig close by and darting almost under the spade after grubs and worms. They sit upon a twig or bough almost motionless (with wings drooping, a habit so common to the Genus) watching the ground intently, and upon the sight of a moving insect, they flit to the ground, capture it, and back to the perch again.

Flight.—Not long sustained, rather jerky, and in most cases flitting from one tree to the other.

Call.—One can hardly say it possesses a song but it twitters in a low soft way as if warbling to itself. It possesses quite a funny little call when alarmed or when one approaches the nest. I have also heard it give this call when a snake or cat has been near. Many of the notes given in springtime or warm days in the winter are very sweet but low.

Food.—Purely insectivorous and will prey upon almost all small moths, flies, beetles, bugs, etc.

Nesting Season.—Extends from the latter end of July to the end of November, this depends upon the season, if it be early or late.

Nest.—Cup-shaped beautiful structure, composed of pieces of dry grass, strips of bark, moss, lichens, and often flower heads; this is bound together by means of cobwebs, the lining is composed of hair, feathers, fur, and down, the nest is often lined very neatly with rabbit fur. Nest is often placed in a horizontal fork and also in an upright one, sometimes in an old stump or behind bark. They are fond of a fruit tree covered with lichens, and by attaching these to the outside of the nest it is almost impossible to detect it.

Eggs.—Three or four in number, almost white, the ground colour greenish with spotting of brown and greyish, purple spots in some cases forming a zone at one end. Dr. Morgan gives measurements as follows—

—Measurements.—

Average dimensions of 12 eggs: 1.86 c.m. x 1.51 c.m.; largest egg, 2.00 c.m. x 1.55 c.m.; smallest egg, 1.80 c.m. x 1.50 c.m.

—By J. W. Mellor, R.A.O.U.—

This beautiful little bird I have found to be one of the most useful of our feathered friends, as it lives almost solely on insect food. At Stirling West in the Mount Lofty Ranges this pretty little bird is common, but nowhere will you find it in greater numbers than a pair to each particular spot, unless there may be a family of two or three young ones, but these are soon made to "shift" after they are old enough to take care of themselves, for they are so quiet and confiding, and apparently peaceful little creatures; the cock birds are ever on the alert if an intruder comes along, especially another male bird. The owner of the spot will soon be seen flying swiftly towards the newcomer, uttering a sharp twitter, which apparently means mischief, and the intruder usually decamps and so saves a conflict, although at times they meet and "have it out" for a short turn only.

The Robins become so tame that they will come right up to the table where meals are being taken 'alfresco', and pick up the crumbs quite close to us.

During nesting season they build close by in a stringy-bark eucalypt, and rear their family. These they generally bring round the back door and under the verandah, where crumbs are plentiful and worms easily procurable from the wet ground nearby. There is a plentiful supply of flies, gnats, and mosquitoes, all of which form tit bits for the Robin's menu.

The young are always dull coloured throughout, without a speck of red to adorn them, and might easily be mistaken for females but for their squeaking notes as they wait for the parent birds to bring them food, and when they espy the old birds approaching they fly to meet them, fluttering their little wings and still more earnestly beseeching for the food that has been brought for them. I noted that the young get the red (in the case of the male) during the first season even before the parent birds have ceased attending to their wants. A small red spot will appear on the upper chest, then a spot on either side of the lower breast, and these three small red spots seem to grow very rapidly, and without moulting a feather, the red spreads all over the breast and the robin is in full livery, the feathers of the back and wings also darken as time goes on. This robin seems to like the solitude of the hills, the higher the elevation the better, and will breed there in preference to the

plains. Their nest is ingeniously constructed of threaded bark and fibres, and lined with a little fur or soft material, and covered with moss and lichen so as to make it appear part of the fork of the tree in which it is placed.
