

BIRD BANDER

Flame Robin Banding and Observations at Langwarrin

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An analysis of a season's banding and observations of Flame Robins (*Petroica phoenicea*) at Langwarrin, 27 miles south of Melbourne, Victoria, suggests a pattern of movement, though the entire meaning at this stage is obscure. (This work is being carried out as part of the VORG Flame Robin Survey, see Vol. 3, p. 73; Vol. 4, p. 67 and Vol. 5, p. 80.)

Following a request to members of the Bird Observers' Club for information regarding Flame Robin sightings, Mr Ron Thoday, a farmer of Langwarrin, telephoned me in mid-April 1967 stating that he had several pairs under observation. From 16 April, a week after the birds first appeared, he made almost daily counts at approximately the same time each day.

Scrub bordered the area, which consisted of a field successively being ploughed and planted with vegetables; another in which cattle grazed; and a third carrying sheep. All fields appeared to be used equally, the birds making a long slow circuit through all three, despite the farmer's daily presence or my occasional appearance.

The accompanying histogram reveals that the number of birds present built up to a peak in June, the highest daily average (for a weekly period) being 15.7 for week ending 4 June. This fell to a fairly constant level between a minimum of 7.7 and a maximum of 10.5 in July and the first half of August. On the two days prior to the departure of the males which were last seen on 23 August, there was an increase in both male and uncoloured birds. The latter may have been males passing through from other areas, including breeding males in immature plumage. From the many reports already received during the short course of this survey, it would appear to be a fairly common practice for pairs

of uncoloured birds indistinguishable from each other to breed successfully.

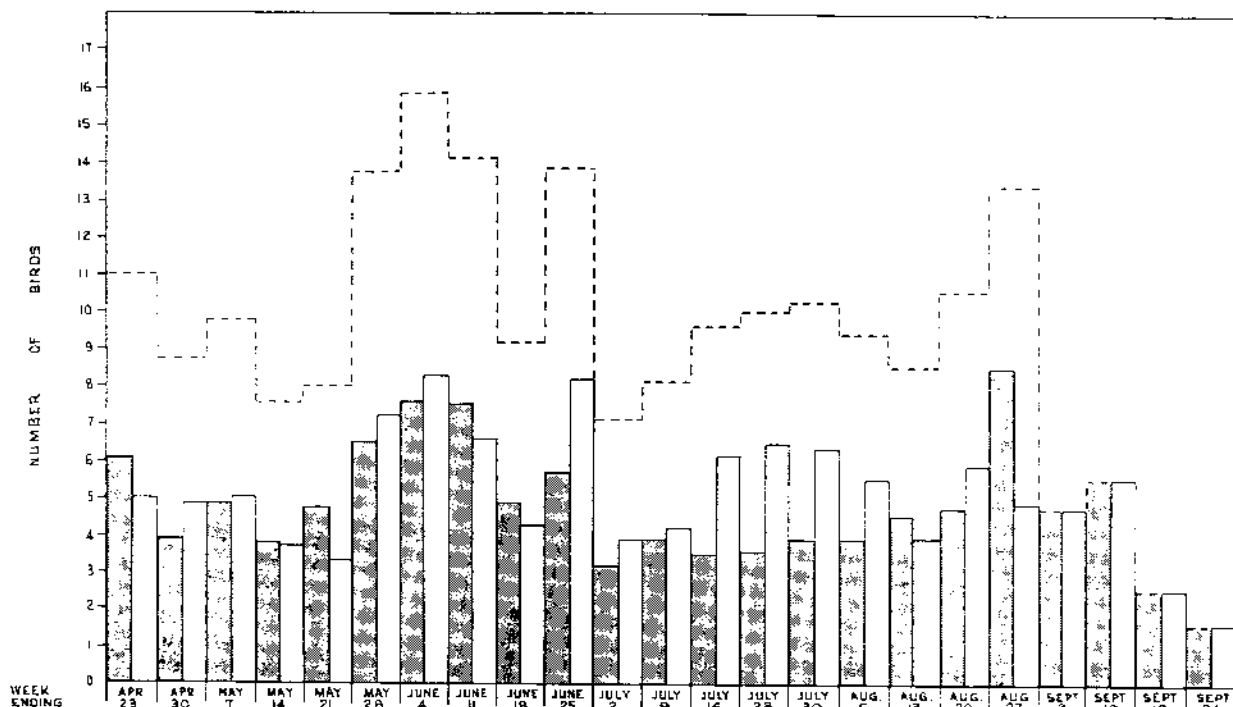
The histogram also reveals that the number of male and uncoloured birds were fairly evenly balanced. In some of the other areas under observation, this is not so and this will be the subject of a later paper.

Uncoloured birds were present for one month after departure of the males, the numbers dwindling gradually until the last observed were two unbanded birds on 21 September.

I commenced banding on 23 April, making ten trips by 3 September. A total of 46 birds was banded with 11 retraps of nine individuals. I used light-weight spring traps baited with live meal worms. Due to the exposed nature of the area, nets were used only twice and attempts were made to drive the birds into them; however, only two birds were caught on each occasion.

Initially, birds were caught almost as soon as the traps were set and while I was still setting others in the vicinity.

In April, three banding trips were made and 11 birds were banded, the greatest number observed on any one day being 15. In May, two banding trips provided 25 banded birds plus two retraps of April birds, the greatest number observed on any one day being 23. It seems evident from this total of 36 banded birds in the first two months that a proportion was moving through to



● Weekly average of daily observations of Flame Robins at Langwarrin, showing numbers of adult males (shaded portions) in relation to females and/or immatures. The dotted outline indicates the total number of birds.

other wintering areas, though the possibility of reduction by predation cannot be ignored.

In June, one trip resulted in seven birds banded plus six retraps. Only one of these was of an April bird retrapped in May. It appeared that all 13 birds present were carrying bands on this day. Again the total of 43 banded in the first three months exceeded the greatest number of 33 observed on any one day.

In July, the position changed, one trip being made with only three birds caught and no retraps, though numbers present warranted a greater catch. The position further deteriorated in August with only one retrap from two trips and the last trip for the season made in September gained only two birds netted, the traps being ignored.

On 23 August all traps were set by 7.30 a.m. The sun was above the trees by 7.10 a.m. with Willie Wagtails (*Rhipidura leucophrys*) and Pipits (*Anthus australis*) feeding. I was well away from the trapping area when the first Flame Robin, uncoloured, appeared at 7.50 a.m., followed after about five minutes by the rest of the party. Twelve birds, some of which were unbanded, lined the fences above the traps and one was seen to examine the bait from a few inches away, but

none was caught.

Retraps were insufficient to suggest a static winter population and, in fact, the entire population could have been changing continually. There were always some banded birds present, though it was impossible to assess either number accurately as the birds were seldom motionless.

Birds were weighed and details of plumage and soft parts noted in an effort to clarify the difference between adult females and immatures.

It is planned to continue working in this area for at least another two years.

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