

Suburban Silvereyes

NARELLE SWANSON

The results of over two years regular banding of Eastern Silvereyes (*Zosterops lateralis*) in a suburban environment are analysed and observations recorded. Interesting aspects of sedentariness are revealed: some individuals were retrapped not only during every month of the year but as often as 28 days in a month. One individual was trapped on 178 days out of 301 days. Feeding habits at the trap are reported. — Hon. Editor.

In mid-June 1965 banding of Eastern Silvereyes commenced in a suburban Sydney backyard using a maze trap raised five feet from the ground. The location is remote from any large expanse of bush or parkland and the vegetation consists predominantly of exotic garden species.

To the end of December 1967, 432 Silvereyes had been banded. Initially, plumage details were not recorded but most of the birds banded have been of the 'Sydney' type. (Lane, 1966). Trapping conditions have varied; 1965 was a good year although results were restricted by lack of experience and time available. In 1966 local conditions were poor as several neighbours severely pruned backyard trees. In 1967 tree cover was normal and the trap which was operated daily, provided a permanent food supply.

For the purpose of analysis, the year has been divided into three periods:

Winter Period—July to September.

Breeding Period—October to December.

'Off' Period—January to June.

Winter Period (July to September)

This is the busiest period with the average number of new birds banded (June to September) being 100. Retrap individuals average 170. Table 1 shows the number of individuals present in each winter month for the three years, and

TABLE 1

Individuals caught in Winter Period with average number of times per individual.

	1965	1966	1967
July	89/3.1	48/3.4	73/3.3
August	76/5.3	25/5.0	113/7.0
September	24/3.8	18/3.0	41/3.6

the average number of visits per bird in each month.

The birds come to the trap in groups at fairly regular time intervals throughout the day. The first arrivals are few and come about an hour after sunrise; the majority come between 7.30 a.m. and 8.30 a.m., many often returning about an hour later and again about midday, with smaller groups coming during the afternoon up to about 4 p.m. Dull, wet weather increased both the number and frequency of birds visiting the trap. On one 'bad weather' day, 64 individuals were caught, when the daily average for the month (August) was 25.

Birds caught during this period may be broadly classified as follows:

- a. Permanent residents. Table 2 lists examples of permanent residents, i.e. known breeding birds of the area, present during the winter period. Two of the birds listed (010-24430 and 010-24431) were a mated pair regularly visiting the trap together. The female (010-24430) was retrapped slightly more than every second day (on an average) for three months. After breeding, she 'disappeared' in December 1966 and has not been retrapped since. In February 1967, her former mate became associated with a new partner (010-24337)—a bird which had been banded on 18 September 1965 but not retrapped in the intervening period. The newly-formed pair kept together during the winter and bred locally in October 1967. One bird (021-39029) which was banded on 5 March 1967, was retrapped on 178 days of the 301 days between that date and the end of the year. It was a male which bred in the locality at the end of 1967.

- b. Probable breeding birds from nearby areas. These birds are present throughout the winter and presumably disperse to nearby areas for breeding. Undoubtedly they are attracted by the food supply in winter. One example (010-24344) was banded on 8 May 1966, retrapped 3 times in June, 13 times in July and 8 times in August before being recovered dead about 200 yards distant, in January 1967, presumably having bred in a nearby area.
- c. Travellers. These are seen on one or two days in early winter (usually in June) then sometimes again later in the winter period. Examples are shown in Table 3 and include three 'Tasmanian type' birds, 010-24455, 010-24461 and 021-39085.

Breeding Period (October to December)

The Breeding Period commences in October and tapers off in December. The onset of warm weather causes a fast drop off in the number of birds caught. In September and early October

retraps of birds banded in June and July occur and a few 'new travellers' add variety to the regular appearance of breeding pairs. The time and group pattern apparent in winter does not exist. Breeding birds usually come individually, males predominating, from soon after dawn until almost dusk; the frequency appears to depend on the age of the brood and the proximity of the nest.

In 1966 there were probably five breeding pairs making constant use of the trap for food. In 1967 there were at least eight pairs. In 1966 adults were first observed taking food away on 9 October. One pair (010-24430 and 010-24431) nesting in a tree about 100 feet from the trap was observed following a routine from trap to nest for several minutes when feeding their nestlings. The same tree was used again as a nest site in 1967 but by a different pair.

On 12 October 1966 fledglings were observed outside the trap being fed by the adults through the wire. Some male birds in particular became very skilled at this technique. Between 23

TABLE 2
Number of days during each month when individual birds were trapped.

Band Number	Year	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
010-24430 (Female)	1965							4	6	4	2	—	1
24431 (Male)								5	6	3	—	—	4
24337 (Female)										1	—	—	—
010-24430	1966	2	1	—	—	—	5	4	14	16	26	12	—
24431		2	1	—	1	1	6	4	11	11	23	13	4
24337		—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
010-24430	1967	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
24431		2	1	14	5	1	1	1	17	6	23	12	12
24337		—	1	13	12	1	1	10	25	22	28	1	—
021-39029 (Male)					5	9	15	21	25	26	17	24	12

TABLE 3

Band Number	Examples of Winter 'Travellers'			
	Date Banded	Dates Retrapped		
010-				
24420	13.6.65	27.9.65		
24452	14.7.65	15.7.65	18.9.65	
24434	7.7.65	25.6.66		
24499	25.7.65	17.8.67		
24315	7.8.65	8.8.65	6.8.67	7.8.67
		27.8.67		
24455	15.7.65	16.7.65	17.7.65	
		(*22.8.65	30.8.65	
		25.9.65)		
24461	15.7.65	16.7.65	17.7.65	
		(*22.8.65)		
021-				
39085	9.6.67	18.6.67	13.7.67	14.7.67

*Retrapped at Lane Cove, 3 miles north of banding place.

October and 20 November 1966, five fledglings and three probable fledglings were banded.

In 1967 the pattern was basically the same. Nesting commenced early in October but only a few young appeared to have survived the variable and adverse weather conditions at that time. One fledgling was banded on 17 October and two nestlings on 28 October. Seventeen young birds were banded between 17 November and 14 December.

'Off' Period (January to June)

By late December, breeding activity has almost ceased. Some adults have moulted and are in fresh plumage, so the age of new (unbanded) birds cannot be determined (In future, skull

ossification and cloacal examination will assist in determining these differences.)

There is an apparent 'wandering' of birds which bred in the area and an influx of others which are mostly unbanded. In the first few months of the year, new (unbanded) birds greatly outnumber retraps from the previous period, but the daily average of individuals (January to May) is only about one. In June, winter flocking is evident from observation but the daily average of birds trapped is still small (about two) probably because berries on which the birds feed, are plentiful in the district. Also in June, the first few Tasmanian visitors are caught.

The number of birds visiting the trap increases in July to a daily average of nine individuals.

This increases to a peak average of 25 individuals per day in August.

Future Work

Further study and banding may provide information on the extent of wandering by permanent residents, the distance fledglings move from their natal area in their first year and the proximity of their breeding location to their natal area.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Messrs. S. G. Lane and R. G. Lonnon for their assistance in the preparation of these notes.

Reference

Lane, S. G. (1966), 'The Co-operative Silvereye Project', *Aust. Bird Bander*, 4:73-75.

(Miss) N. M. Swanson,
88 Burnell Street,
Five Dock, N.S.W.

Immature plumage of Flame Robins

Lack of information concerning immature plumage is one of the major problems for banders in Australia. In most instances little information is available and where such is the case, it usually states rather vaguely that 'the juvenile and/or immature is similar in plumage to the female'.

The only significant information I have received to date from retrapping Flame Robins (*Petroica phoenicea*) was from an immature male banded by A. J. Reid on 30 April 1964 at Flinders Naval Depot, Victoria, a wintering area for this species. The only detail recorded was that it had an orange throat. I retrapped it on 3 September 1967, over

three years later, as an adult male in full plumage, about one mile south of the banding place.

During this past season I have made similar recordings of Flame Robins in 'uncoloured' plumage, as well as some birds with an orange wash extending over all or part of the chin, throat, breast, belly and flanks. I should be glad if those participating in banding this species would record on schedules the areas so coloured in an endeavour to sort out the plumage differences of females and immatures.

(Mrs) P. N. Reilly,
1 Exon Street, Hampton, Vic.