

BIRD BANDER

Flame Robin Banding at the You Yangs

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Banding of Flame Robins (*Petroica phoenicea*) has been carried out rather intermittently during autumn and winter at the You Yangs, north of Geelong, Victoria, for over eight years. The results have shown that the locality is used annually as a wintering area, and that some birds have been retrapped in more than one subsequent season. An analysis of retrap data has revealed plumage problems.

Introduction

In June 1960, Duncan and Robert MacKenzie and the author constructed several spring traps from rat traps. Using cockchafer grubs for bait, we began trapping Flame Robins which were plentiful in an area at the You Yangs. The robins arrive late in March, or early in April, each year and are numerous until late in August or early in September when they leave, apparently to return to their breeding areas.

Initially, by banding the birds in their wintering area, we hoped that from subsequent recoveries we would determine their breeding localities. (So far, over 500 Flame Robins have been banded at the You Yangs without a recovery being reported!) However, as retraps at the banding site began to accumulate, other aspects developed which provided the stimulus to continue the project.

Later, meal worms, considered a more suitable bait, were obtained. Although not showing any sign of being trap-shy, the birds' interest in meal worms apparently varies. Often they will pass close by a trap, occasionally even perching on it, without attempting to take the worm. Pauline Reilly (1968) also mentioned this habit, but the reason for it is not yet known.

Except on wet days, Flame Robins almost invariably drink and bathe before going to roost; exploiting this habit, we have used mist nets extensively, and netting at waterholes has been most productive. Windy conditions and the exposed nature of the working area hinders netting, and often renders the use of nets a waste of time.

There was a decline in the number of visits made during the seasons from 1962 to 1966 as both Duncan and Robert MacKenzie were unable to participate frequently; due to business reasons they were residing away from Geelong. Geoff Gayner joined the group as a bander in 1966 and has considerably assisted the work since that time.

Habitat

The original vegetation was a dense growth of Golden Wattle (*Acacia pycnantha*) with Yellow Gums (*Eucalyptus leucoxyton*), Red Gum (*E. camaldulensis*) and She Oaks (*Casuarina stricta*) scattered throughout. The Flame Robins roosted in this area and moved out into the paddocks of "Wooloomanata" property to feed during the day. Banding commenced along the margin of the wattle scrub.

The wattle area is Crown land, known locally as "Brushwood", and it is controlled by the



Male Flame Robin

Forests Commission of Victoria (F.C.V.); "Woolloomanata" is a privately owned property that abuts "Brushwood". In the summer prior to the 1962 season, the large trees were removed in accordance with the programme of the F.C.V. During the following two summers, the wattles were bulldozed, the area ploughed and then planted with Sugar Gums (*E. cladocalyx*).

Despite these changes, robins continued to visit the area each winter. In the 1966 and 1967 seasons, they were trapped and netted around a waterhole which they frequented despite the removal of most of the vegetations.

Plantations of Brown Mallett (*E. astringens*) in stands about 30 feet high immediately north of

the cleared section of "Brushwood" were subsequently used for roosting in lieu of the wattles which had been used before being bulldozed.

Banding

Table 1 shows the details of birds banded and retrapped each month during the "winter" period. It also shows the number of visits each month when birds were caught; it is unfortunate that records were not kept of the visits when none was caught. Table 2 shows the summarized figures for each year.

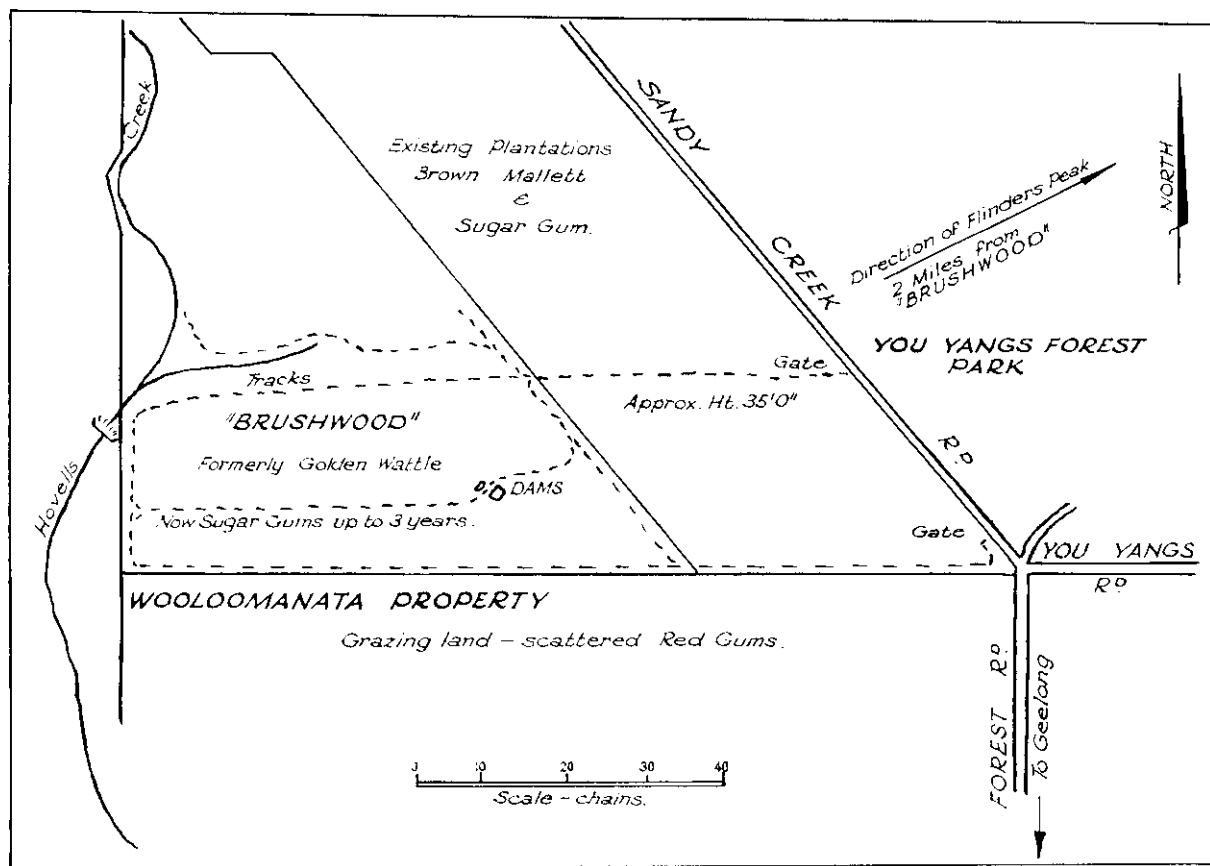
To the end of the 1967 season, 534 Flame Robins were banded at the You Yangs. The earliest banding in any season took place on 7 April (1962) and the latest on 18 September (1960). The largest number caught in any one day occurred on 29 April (1961) when 51 birds were caught (including seven retraps).

Seventy-five individuals have been retrapped at the banding area as follows:

- 27 within 5 months of banding (i.e. during the season they were banded).
- 28 between 9 and 16 months after banding (one season later).
- 7 between 24 and 25 months after banding (2 seasons later).
- 5 between 32 and 36 months after banding (3 seasons later).
- 7 between 47 and 50 months after banding (4 seasons later).
- 1 at 61 months after banding (5 seasons later).

TABLE 1

Year	April			May			June			July			August			September		
	Banded	Retrapped	Visits	Banded	Retrapped	Visits	Banded	Retrapped	Visits	Banded	Retrapped	Visits	Banded	Retrapped	Visits	Banded	Retrapped	Visits
1960	—	—	—	—	—	—	28	—	4	46	5	10	11	4	5	15	3	5
1961	97	1	5	23	9	6	10	—	2	19	10	4	4	7	2	—	—	—
1962	62	1	5	9	—	2	—	—	—	4	2	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
1963	32	2	5	45	10	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	14	2	2	—	—	—
1964	8	—	2	10	4	2	16	3	3	—	—	—	8	5	1	—	—	—
1965	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	5	—	1	—	—	—
1966	—	—	—	—	—	—	11	—	3	2	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
1967	2	—	1	9	2	2	21	2	4	22	3	2	1	—	1	—	—	—
TOTALS:	201	4	18	96	25	16	86	5	16	93	20	18	43	18	12	15	3	5



The You Yangs banding area.

TABLE 2

Year	Banded	Retrapped	Visits
1960	100	12	24
1961	153	27	19
1962	75	3	8
1963	91	14	11
1964	42	12	8
1965	5	—	1
1966	13	—	4
1967	55	7	10
Total:	534	75	85

Plumage

The most interesting feature emerging from the retraps so far is the wide variation of colouring on the underparts from the chin to the abdomen; three distinct patterns are briefly described as follows:

Brown birds — the underparts are uniformly brown or brown with a gingery wash.

Partly coloured birds — showing definite red colouring to the feathers on the underparts, either as a uniform wash of variable extent or a number of red spots.

Adult male — fully plumaged males.

For birds in brown plumage when banded, the following summary shows the plumage when re-trapped in subsequent seasons.



Part of the banding area with Flinders Peak in the background.

Two retrapped the following season partly coloured.

One retrapped three seasons later partly coloured.

Two retrapped four seasons later partly coloured.

One retrapped the following season in adult male plumage.

One retrapped two seasons later in adult male plumage.

Two retrapped four seasons later in adult male plumage.

One retrapped five seasons later in adult male plumage.

(No partly coloured birds have been subsequently retrapped in adult male plumage.)

Colour Banding

Banding is to continue in this area in an attempt to further the observations on plumage, and to ascertain, if possible, the breeding locality

of the birds which winter at the You Yangs. Plastic colour bands—two red bands on the one leg—are being used to increase the 'recovery' potential by observation; the colour banding pattern has been allocated by the VORG Flame Robin Survey, and different colour patterns are being used for various areas. Individual colour banding is not being used.

Acknowledgements

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Reference

Reilly, P. N. (1968). 'A Flame Robin Trap', *Aust. Bird Bander*, 6: 82-83.

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