

Notes on Banding Nesting Flame Robins

KATHARINE HOUGH

For the last few years, large flocks of Flame Robins *Petroica phoenicea* have been seen in the latter part of September and early in October in a gully which runs up into the thickly timbered foothills of the Hume Range 45 kilometres north of Melbourne.

This gully is about 4 kilometres due south of Mount Disappointment (altitude 793 m) which is a known nesting area for this species. The gully (altitude 290 m) is considered to be a gathering or staging place before the birds move higher into the ranges to breed, the latest recorded sighting being on 8 October 1970.

Here on 19 September 1971, members of the Whittlesea group of the VORG Flame Robin Survey found a flock of about 12 birds, and a pair, both uncoloured, building in the upturned root-section of a fallen tree. Observers in the district have been alert for sightings of Flame Robins for the past four years, but this was the first time a nest had been found at such a low altitude in this district. Because of the good prospects for retrapping in the future, banding was delayed to minimize interference.

Though both birds were in grey-brown plumage they were easily distinguished as the male was much darker. The female did all the building, escorted by the male to and from the nest, and later she appeared to be responsible for all the brooding of the eggs and young. She was not heard to call at any time.

Collection of nest material took from 5 to 40 seconds and nest building from 15 to 75 seconds. The time most commonly spent was about 10 seconds collecting and about 25 seconds working.

When the nest was revisited on 25 September, it appeared finished except for lining; this was later completed with sheep's wool. Neither of the birds was seen nor heard nearby, though lower down the valley a small mixed flock of seven Flame Robins was seen. The day was cold and

overcast with strong winds and few bird species were in evidence.

During the next two weeks, the nest was under observation every two or three days, though not approached too closely for fear of causing desertion. Therefore dates of egg laying are unknown. On 15 October, the parent birds were reported feeding three very small young. Thus, if lining the nest was completed on 26 September, the maximum possible period for egg laying and incubating was 18 days.

On 17 October, four unset traps baited with mealworms were placed within 15 metres of the nest, three near favoured perches and the fourth within 2 metres of the nest. While this trap was being positioned, the female continued to feed the young. Every second day the mealworms were replaced and before long both parents took the worms almost as soon as they were put out.

On 24 October, it was decided to band the nine-day old nestlings. This time the traps were to be baited and set, but the male was caught in the first trap before the others could be adjusted. He was quickly placed in a holding bag while the nestlings, which now had well-grown wing and tail feathers, were banded and replaced in the nest. The female did not seem unduly agitated, gave no distress calls and perched within three metres of the banders.

After the male was banded and released, both birds disappeared and the banders left the area. An hour later they returned to find both parents feeding the young as usual.

On 31 October, 16 days after feeding commenced, the parents were in the tree adjacent to the nest feeding the three fledglings now

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Tasmanian Type Silvereyes in New South Wales

S. G. LANE

Tasmanian type Silvereyes *Zosterops lateralis tasmanica* are distinguishable by the rufous flanks and a grey or white throat sometimes with a little yellow usually near the chin. Plumage differences for these and other silvereye types occurring in south-eastern Australia have been given previously (Lane 1962, 1966).

Normally Tasmanian type Silvereyes arrive in the Sydney district in May and depart in September each year. I know of only one record between November and March. Mr J. E. Walsh informed me that he had caught about 50 silvereyes at La Perouse near the entrance to Botany Bay shortly after daylight on 22 February 1964. These birds were netted as they sought cover in a hedgeline. Walsh stated that the birds seemed somewhat exhausted. From his description given to me the same day, most were apparently Tas-

manian type birds. In that season I recorded the first Tasmanian type Silvereyes on 30 May, later than in most other years.

My own earliest arrival date recorded for the Sydney district is 24 April and the latest departure date 8 October. I have only two records for October and usually the majority of the Tasmanian type Silvereyes have departed by mid September.

The percentage of Tasmanian type Silvereyes among winter flocks near Sydney varies rather considerably. Of 716 silvereyes caught near Mount Keira at the southern fringe of the Sydney district on 6 May 1967 and 218 on 7 May 1967, the percentages were:

Type	6 May 1967	7 May 1967
Tasmanian	75.9	41.6
Sydney	2.5	3.7
Others	21.6	54.7

The average percentage of Tasmanian type birds banded during seven winters at North Ryde (Sydney) was 61 per cent. On some days the figure exceeded 80 per cent while in August 1959, 85 per cent were Tasmanian type birds. Table 1 shows the numbers banded at North Ryde in the months of May to September from 1959 to 1965, with the percentages of Tasmanian type birds which are included in the numbers banded.

In June, July and August 1965, I banded 288 silvereyes at Lane Cove of which 181 (63%) were Tasmanian type birds. During May only four local type silvereyes were caught while none was caught in September.

just able to fly. Traps set to catch the female were ignored and the young were encouraged by their parents to move further off. The banded birds were seen in the vicinity for a few weeks but no attempt was made to raise a second brood.

The maximum period from early nest building until the young left the nest was 42 days. The periods for laying/incubating and hatching to fledging are within the range given by Courtney and Marchant (1971).

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Reference

Courtney, J. and Marchant, S. (1971), 'Breeding Details of Some Common Birds in South-eastern Australia', *Emu* 71: 121-133.

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