

**LOW ALTITUDE RECORD OF
RUFIOUS SCRUB-BIRD
*Atrichornis rufescens***

The Rufous Scrub-bird *Atrichornis rufescens* is an uncommon and elusive species. Once distributed through a range of altitudes, it has been considered extirpated from below 400 m (Morris *et al.* 1981), and in recent years has been found rarely below 600 m. The bird is very difficult to see, and even then an observed individual is almost always a calling adult male. Females and young birds are very cryptic, and unlike the male are not vocal and show little response to broadcasted recordings of calls. This has led to virtually all illustrations and photographs and most descriptions referring to adult males, which also comprise the majority of specimens represented in museum collections. In light of this information, an individual netted during an Australian Bird Study Association banding workshop is of interest because of its place of capture and its probable age.

A Rufous Scrub-bird was netted and banded by Brian Tynan at Pappinbarra (31°15'28"S, 152°25'10"E), 45 km west of Wauchope, New South Wales, on 19 April 1987 (band no. 040-86545). Before the bird was released, plumage notes and measurements were taken by Walter Boles.

The altitude of the Pappinbarra netting site was about 240 m, well below the lower altitude at which this species is now considered to occur. It was in a flat area that had been cleared of forest as part of a homestead. This has since failed and the area is now a field study centre. The actual site of the net was in a former rose garden, still containing roses and other non-native plants. This is very unlike the strict habitat normally required by this species (Ferrier 1986). There is regrowth of bracken fern and Wild Tobacco up to the garden, which is about 50 m from the nearest native vegetation.

The bird is considered to have been an immature. The body plumage was textured like that of an adult, without the looseness associated with juvenile body feathers in passerines. The chin and throat were light fawn-brown, darker on lower part, with a yellowish tinge; there was no black on breast, as in the adult male. The wings and tail were barred black; they lacked excessive

wear, and were probably new although somewhat ruffled from netting. There was no wing moult; the outer left tail feather was not fully grown. Soft part colours were upper mandible dark horn-brown, tip paler; lower mandible horn-brown, base pale cream yellow; gape pale cream yellow; and iris dark brown. Measurements were wing 60 mm, wingspan 199 mm, tail 72 mm, total head length 37.2 mm and weight 24.0 g. A photograph of this individual by Nigel Secomb has been deposited with the NPIAW (XT8896).

This individual differed from details of plumage, soft parts and measurements given for juveniles (Jackson 1921) and adult females (Jackson 1920), while agreeing well with the young male described by Jackson (1921). It varied from the immature male in Slater *et al.* (1986) by the absence of dusky markings along the side of and pale centre to the chest. It could have been an immature female.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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