

# Results from Banding Brown Treecreepers

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Brown Treecreepers have been banded and retrapped over a period of fifteen years as part of the Mount Mary Plains Survey in South Australia. Data were obtained on longevity, weight differences between the sexes, and fluctuations in local populations.

The Brown Treecreeper *Climacteris picumnus* is a familiar bird in suitable patches of mature mallee scrub with numerous hollow trees on the Mount Mary Plains west to the eastern foothills of the Mount Lofty Ranges. It undoubtedly was very widely spread and common in the region in its virgin state. Nowadays many scrubs consist of regrowth mallee which does not provide suitable refuge and nesting habitat, and apparently do not provide the favoured feeding conditions supplied by the older trees and the fallen timber among the scrub litter. Alteration of the habitat following European occupation has affected the status of the species which is now largely confined to remnant patches of tall old trees.

The Brown Treecreeper is the only member of the genus occurring in the area covered by the banding stations.

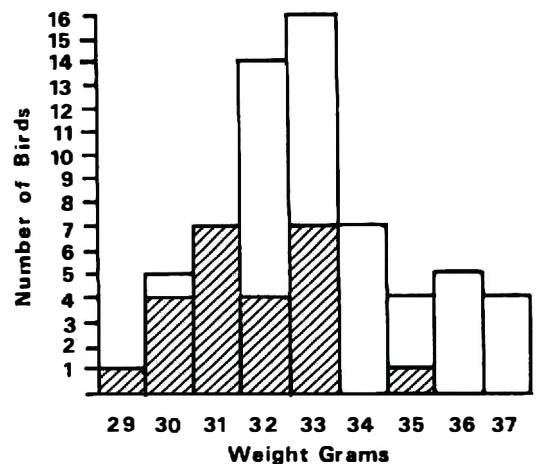
## Results

Banding\* of Brown Treecreepers commenced in October 1963 when Messrs R. M. Gibbs and M. H. Waterman netted and banded nine birds west of Bower. I started work on the Area Survey in the spring of 1964, and altogether 171 treecreepers were banded locally to 1976. The majority of these was banded at only two stations where, moreover, all the retraps were obtained. Mist nets were used to catch birds, the nets being set in groups among clumps of tall trees. During the Area Survey there were 558 operating days, of which 272 days were at two banding stations, Erdora Scrub (88) and Black Oaks Block (184). A total of 153 birds banded at the two stations yielded 51 retraps (33%), 78 times.

A preponderance of males was recorded. Of 147 sexed birds 91 (61.9%) were males and 56 females (38%). Out of 171 treecreepers banded 24 (14%) were unsexed.

Most treecreepers were banded at the Erdora Scrub, (120) 3 km East of Sutherland, and there were 44 retraps (37%) 71 times. On the Black Oaks Block, 5 km West of Bower, 31 birds were banded, with seven retraps (22%). No retraps were secured from 18 birds banded at other places where the populations were either small and mist netting spots unsuitable or infrequently operated.

Table 1 shows the survival rate in the consecutive years after banding. Five individuals survived over six years after banding. The oldest bird, a female, (030-82828) banded east of Sutherland on 7 November 1964, was retrapped six times at the banding place, the last occasion on 14 March 1976, 11 years, 4 months, 7 days after banding (Anon. 1977).



• Figure 1. Histogram of weights of 63 Brown Treecreepers. Hatched area females, Non-hatched males.

\* Bands used were provided by the Australian Bird-banding Scheme, Division of Wildlife Research, CSIRO.

TABLE 1  
Recoveries of Brown Treecreepers in relation to numbers banded.

Year	Number Banded	Recoveries in years after banding											Total	
		0-1	1-2	2-3	3-4	4-5	5-6	6-7	7-8	8-9	9-10	10-11		11-12
1963	9	1												1
1964	24	7	4	3	3	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	28
1965	27	5	3	3	2	1	1	1	1					17
1966	17	4	3	3	2	2	2	2	1	1	1			21
1967	23	10	5	4	3	2	1							25
1968	8	3	2											5
1969	3	2	1	1	1	1								6
1970	12	3	2	1										6
1971	6	2	1											3
1972	14	4	4	2	2	2								14
1973	18	6	6	3										15
1974	1	1												1
1975	1													—
1976	8	2	1											3
Total	171	50	32	20	13	10	6	5	3	2	2	1	1	145

### Weights

Weights of a number of treecreepers were taken to the nearest full gram using a beam-balance. Males (39) ranged from 30-37 grams and females (24) from 29-35 grams. Histogram (Fig. 1) gives details.

### Discussion

There is some movement of Brown Treecreepers after the breeding season, and at times the population fluctuated markedly. Nevertheless, no retraps were obtained from other banding stations, presumably because these were too distant or not connected by suitable habitat.

Following removal of much fallen timber and off-cuts (from timber-cutting by a previous landowner) for the purpose of firewood from the black Oaks Block in the early 1950's to the mid 1960's the Brown Treecreeper population declined considerably. It was also observed that stacks of trash such as boughs and off-cuts from timber cutting for fence posts attracted numerous treecreepers at the Erdora Scrub station.

Later, when the stacks were removed for use as firewood the birds were in much reduced numbers.

Reader's Digest (1976) and Noske (1979) remarked on the use made by Brown Treecreepers of rough-barked trees and fallen timber.

It was interesting to see some treecreepers take refuge in hollows in trees, logs, and even in rabbit warrens when released after processing. Chestnut-crowned Babblers *Pomatostomus ruficeps* sometimes behave in a similar manner. Possibly these two species resort to such refuges when pursued by hawks. Reference to this habit by treecreepers was made by Hindwood (1966).

### References

- Anon. (1977), Recovery Round-up, *Corella* 1: 23.  
 Hindwood, K. A. (1966), Australian Birds in Colour. A. H. and A. W. Reed, Sydney.  
 Noske, R. A. (1979), 'Co-existence of three species of treecreepers in north-eastern New South Wales', *Emu* 79: 120-128.  
 Reader's Digest, (1976), Reader's Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds. Reader's Digest Services Pty. Ltd., Sydney.