

Petroeca ramsayi, Sharpe, a Variety of *P. goodenovii*, Vig. and Hors.

BY ROBERT HALL.

Petroeca ramsayi is said to be found only in the Northern Territory and North-Western Australia.

P. goodenovii is said not to be found in these areas, but in all others of Australia.

I have personally collected in Swan Hill, Victoria (21/2/1900), a skin of *P. ramsayi*, and I know of one being found near the centre of the continent, so that in the first place the distribution of each may be extended. To see and collect *P. ramsayi* in Victoria seems remarkable.

Now this Victorian specimen of *P. ramsayi* is only partially marked red on the throat, but the few feathers have that colour so definitely marked that it would not for a moment be called *P. goodenovii*, which has a black throat.

It had occurred to me, judging by the known distribution of the two species, that when the Red-capped Robins started from the Cape York Peninsula to populate our continent* the red-throated part went due west and had to stop at a little beyond the Fitzroy River, owing to geographical barriers; and that the black-throated part went due south as far as Victoria, then west to Albany, W.A., and north to a little above Geraldton, W.A. There it stayed, owing to the same desert barriers that stopped the downward western course of the red-throated part.

The above specimen appears to be a connecting link between the two. I mentioned the matter to Mr. G. A. Keartland, who tells me he saw several mature birds in North-Western Australia with only a flush of red upon their throats, and others without any.

The fact, in addition, of finding this abnormal specimen where "black throats" alone are said to be found, leads me to consider the two species one and the same. It is like a case of reversion, where the black pigment of the throat has turned out the red and the red of the forehead has turned out the black. This would tend to make the species a much modified off-shoot of *P. leggii*. However, this is by the way just now.

The Swan Hill specimen is a moulting bird, showing the wing quills and many of the interscapulum feathers still brown as in the young bird of the first year. It is interesting to note that this brown pigment is a combination of the red and black that are shown in strong contrast the following year. The forehead is a blaze of developing "reds," while the breast is uniform red and concluded in the moult of the season. The usual black parts of the adult plumage are nearly as black in this specimen.

It would have been interesting to know whether the next

* "Key to the Birds of Australia and Tasmania," Hall, pp. vi., vii., viii.

moult, would have produced a stronger red on the throat or reverted to the more ordinary black, as is now usual.

Upon the evidence I make *P. ramsayi*, Sharpe, a variety of *P. goodenovii*, Vig. and Hors.

Bird Protection.

BY FRANK M. LITTLER, Launceston.

ALL lovers of our native birds view with dread the wanton destruction that goes on year by year in every state of Federated Australia. They feel that the time has arrived when united and strenuous efforts must be made if we wish our feathered friends, and even those we count as enemies, to survive and brighten our bush wilds with their gay plumages.

Small boys, with their "catapults" and "pea-rifles," are not the greatest offenders; it is that class of persons who ought to know better against whom we have to contend. An inborn, insatiable desire to kill something is one of the worst traits of Australian youths. They take their guns into the bush and are not content with legitimate game but must try their prowess on all and sundry that come across their path. They appear to feel that it is dependent on them to "slay, and slay, and slay."

Farmers are responsible for the destruction of a great number of birds, the reason for which being that they consider birds are responsible for a large annual loss of fruit and crops.

Such being the case they (the birds) are shot unceasingly whenever opportunity offers. I do not say that birds do not commit a certain amount of havoc every year among fruit and crops, but what I contend is that their good deeds far outweigh their bad, and this is patent to all who take the trouble to investigate the matter for themselves.

Would that our farmers and orchardists studied more to distinguish between friends and foes, and understood fully that if a bird in the summer takes its share of the produce, it in the winter pays it back with interest twice compounded by destroying countless numbers of hibernating larvæ, eggs, and full-grown insects, which in the summer would perhaps ruin his harvest of grain and fruit completely.

Fortunately, in this island State birds are not destroyed for the sake of their plumage, to satisfy the vanity of the fairer sex. But this is done to a certain extent in the other States, and in an alarming degree in nearly every other country in the world.

Now to consider the case of a suburban garden, with its limited stock of fruit trees, jealously watched over by their owner, who, in his mind's eye sees the luscious fruit ready for picking when the right time comes. In due course the fruit ripens, and the owner views it with expectant eyes, thinking how well some will grace the table at next Sunday's dinner.