

VARIATION IN THE WHITE-BROWED TREECREEPER*

In his detailed revision of *Climacteris* Keast (1957, *Aust. J. Zool.* 5: 480) said of the White-browed Treecreeper that 'geographic variation is minor' and did not recognize races. Peters (Greenway 1967, *Check-list of birds of the world*, 12) followed and listed *Climacteris affinis* as monotypic. A series of specimens obtained by the Harold Hall Expeditions and other material in the British Museum show that there are two variants lying east and west of a zone extending north from Spencer Gulf through Lake Eyre and the Simpson Desert, which marks a barrier whose influence is also evident in many other groups.

The White-browed Treecreeper takes the name *Climacteris affinis* from a description by Blyth (1864, *J. Asiat. Soc. Bengal* 32: 453) of a variety of what was thought to be *Climacteris erythroptus*, which had been sent to the Calcutta Museum from the Melbourne Museum. No locality was given and Mathews (1930, *Systema Avium Australasianarum*: 695) designated the type locality as Broken Hill, NSW. Blyth's description does not include the features which are now found to distinguish the races but they are noted in Mellor's description (1919, *S. Aust. Orn.* 4: 5) of *Climacteris erythroptus parsoni* from Pungonda on the Murray River, near the border of South Australia, about 250 km distant; Mathews' locality therefore may be accepted as it seems to be within the estimated range of the eastern form, and Mellor's name becomes a synonym. Mellor compared his material with North's *Climacteris superciliosa* (1895, *Ibis*: 341), the relevant statement being: 'upper tail coverts grey; tail brownish grey'. Other specimens in which there is a distinct patch of grey, contrasting with the brown base, usually on feathers of the rump, upper tail coverts and tail (except for the black subterminal tail band) have been collected by the Hall Expeditions from Angepena Hs. in the Flinders Ranges and Tyrone Hs. near Langlo Crossing north-west of Charleville in south-west Queensland.

Mellor saw only North's description which does not include the colour of the upper tail coverts. North's *superciliosa* specimens have been kindly lent from the Australian Museum, Sydney. They differ in having the upper tail and coverts brownish, almost uniform with the back. They were taken at Illara Creek, about 160 km south-west of Alice Springs. Other specimens from near Alice Springs, kindly lent from the Northern Territory Museum, are similar; they are from 10 km north of Alice Springs, Harry Creek about 48 km to the north and Todd River Station. Additional matching specimens were collected by the Hall Expeditions from 30 km south-west of Granite Downs in South Australia and near

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Giles, Warburton Mission and Carnegie in Western Australia. A series from near Laverton collected by Shortridge in 1905-6 also fits and on this evidence I assume that Mathews' specimen from Callion, 96 km north-west of Kalgoorlie, is similar. These western brown-tailed birds take North's name and become *Climacteris affinis superciliosa* with Mathews' (1912, *Novit. Zool.* **18**: 383) *C. erythrops neositta* from Callion as synonym.

In summary the nomenclature is:

- (1) *Climacteris affinis affinis*
Climacteris affinis Blyth 1864: (Broken Hill, NSW).
Climacteris erythrops parsoni Mellor 1919: Pungonda, SA.
East of the Simpson Desert, Lake Eyre and Spencer Gulf.
- (2) *Climacteris affinis superciliosa*
Climacteris superciliosa North 1895: Illara, NT.
Climacteris erythrops neositta Mathews 1912: Callion, WA.
West of the Simpson Desert, Lake Eyre and Spencer Gulf.

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