

## THE RED-CAPPED ROBIN

*Petroica goodenovii*



Photo: "Aviceda"

The Red-capped Robin is a small passerine bird native to Australia. Like many brightly coloured robins of the *Petroicidae* family, it is sexually dimorphic. It is predominantly a ground-feeding insectivore.

Initially thought to be related to flycatchers, the Red-capped Robin was described as *Muscicapa goodenovii* by Nicholas Vigors and



Photo: "Aviceda"

Thomas Horsfield in 1827, before later transferral to the genus *Petroica*. The generic name is derived from the Ancient Greek words *petro-* "rock" and *oikos* "home", from their habit of sitting on rocks. It has also been referred to as *Redhead*, *Redcap*, *Robin Red-breast* or *Red-throated Robin*. *Kuburi* is a name from the Kimberleys.

The Red-capped Robin is one of five red or pink-breasted species of robin in the genus *Petroica*; they are colloquially known as "Red Robins" as distinct from the "Yellow Robins" of the genus *Eopsaltria*. Although named after the European Robin, is not closely related to it or the American Robin (see front cover of December 2008 magazine).

The smallest of the Australian red robins, the Red-capped Robin is 10.5-12.5cm (4-5") long with a wingspan of 15-19.5cm (6-8"), and weighs around 7-9 g (0.25-0.31oz ). It has longer legs than others in the genus. The male has a distinctive scarlet cap and breast. His upperparts are jet black with white shoulder bars, and his tail black with white tips. The underparts and shoulder are white. All colours are sharply delineated from one another. The female is an undistinguished grey-brown above with a reddish tint to the crown, paler underneath with dark brown wings and a pale buff wing patch. Some females have a reddish tint to the breast. This robin has a small black bill, and dark brown iris and legs. Immature birds resemble the female.

The Red-capped Robin is found across Australia except for Tasmania, the Top End and Cape York. Offshore populations exist on Flinders Island in Bass Strait, Greenly and Pearson Islands off the Eyre Peninsula, as well as on Rottne Island. The Red-capped Robin prefers more arid habitat than its relatives, and inhabits dryer inland areas while the Scarlet Robin occupies the better coastal country. Its preferred habitat is dry mixed scrubland or woodland. The species has generally fared badly from human change to the landscape.



The Red-capped Robin mostly pounces on prey on the ground, but can swoop and catch insects while airborne. Less often, it takes prey while perched in low-lying vegetation, almost always less than 3m (10') above the ground. A low branch may be used as a vantage point in hunting.

The diet consists of insects and small arthropods. One study of Red-capped Robin faeces conducted near Kambalda, Western Australia revealed 96% of their diet was made up of beetles, while ants made up the remainder. Other prey recorded include spiders, and insects such as grasshoppers including the Australian Plague Locust (*Chortoicetes terminifera*), adult and larval butterflies, moths, and flies such as Blowflies and Horseflies.

The breeding season is late winter to early summer with up to three broods being raised. The nest is a neat, deep cup made of soft dry grass and bark. Spider web, feathers and fur are used for binding or filling. The nest is generally in a tree fork or even in mistletoe. It may be decorated with lichen and camouflaged to blend in with its surroundings. Two to three dull white eggs tinted blue, grey or brown and splotched with dark grey-brown are laid measuring 16mm x 13mm. Females alone develop brood patches and incubate, although both sexes feed the young. Hatchlings take two weeks to fledge. The Red-capped Robin is sometimes parasitised by the Horsfield's Bronze-cuckoo (*Chalcites basalis*).

R.V.C. with help from Wikipedia