

Rufous Scrub-birds

These notes are intended as prompts for discussion purposes. Sources are referenced (e.g. F63 indicates page 63 of Simon Ferrier's PhD thesis).

Song

- Most singing birds will be males. Females do sing but rarely and may duet with males. Females have a faint contact call "tick-tick" (F188).
- Males sing in bouts which may last up to 10 minutes repeating the same phrase over and over. (F 188 to 190).
- Song bouts may be followed by a period of silence or a period of mimicry.
- In the southern population at BGTops the syllables in each phrase are more spaced out and more often have an upward inflexion. (F205)
- The reasons for the differences between the song of the northern and southern sub-species is unclear but differences in habitat may be involved.
- The northern population is more likely to be found in rainforest. The southern population is less frequently found in rain forest and seems to prefer the more open forest adjacent to rainforest.
- Birds may be attracted to play back calls but become silent as they approach the source. Experience on the success of play back seems mixed.

Morphology

- The southern sub-species have a shorter tarsus length. There is no other variation (e.g. wing length) with latitude.

Habitat

- Rufous Scrub-birds probably evolved in *nothofagus moorei* beech forests. There was a much drier period in pre-history during which beech forests shrank in size and many birds adapted to wetter forests.
- They are threatened by logging and fire and this has exacerbated the formation of isolated populations.
- Rain forest patches may buffer the scrub-birds from the impact of fire.
- If logging and burning had continued unchecked the species could have been extinct by 2030 (F255). Fortunately habitat has reserved as National Parks.
- Climate change could cause rain forest retreat to higher altitudes exacerbating habitat loss.
- Historically the scrub-bird was found in the Big Scrub lowland rain forest. Presently it is found above 600m, primarily above 1000m altitude.

Detection

- In the Barrington/Gloucester Tops IBA it is found adjacent to tracks and roads near rain forest, but often not actually in the rainforest.
- It is primarily detected by hearing calling males.
- Territories are typically one acre in size.

- Males call throughout the year but most frequently in October and November when the detection rate by an experienced observer walking a transect at 2.5km/hour is over 80% for a strip of habitat 150m either side of the transect.
- Detection may be influenced by weather and favoured by high humidity.
- Males seeking to establish a territory may call at times, but do not persistently advertise a territory at the same location. Finding a territory at the same location on two visits one month apart is considered diagnostic for a territorial male.
- Male scrub-birds live for ten or more years and are faithful to their territory from year to year.
- In 1981 17 territories were located during transects surveys totalling 18km.in the BGTops IBA (F 70).

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