

Eastern Yellow Robin

Eopsaltria australis

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Hunter Bird
Observers Club

Affiliated with BirdLife Australia



An adult Eastern Yellow Robin (photo: Dawn Riggett)

General Comments

This is a common and readily-recognised bird. There are few species in Australia that have such a bright yellow breast and which are so confiding. Eastern Yellow Robins don't much mind the presence of humans and often will continue to forage while people are close by. A regular sighting for a birdwatcher is of an Eastern Yellow Robin clinging to a tree trunk just a few metres away; the bird's only focus being to find its next meal. Its early morning "chew-chew" call is also a very familiar sound in the dawn chorus – it's usually one of the first birds to call, wherever they occur.

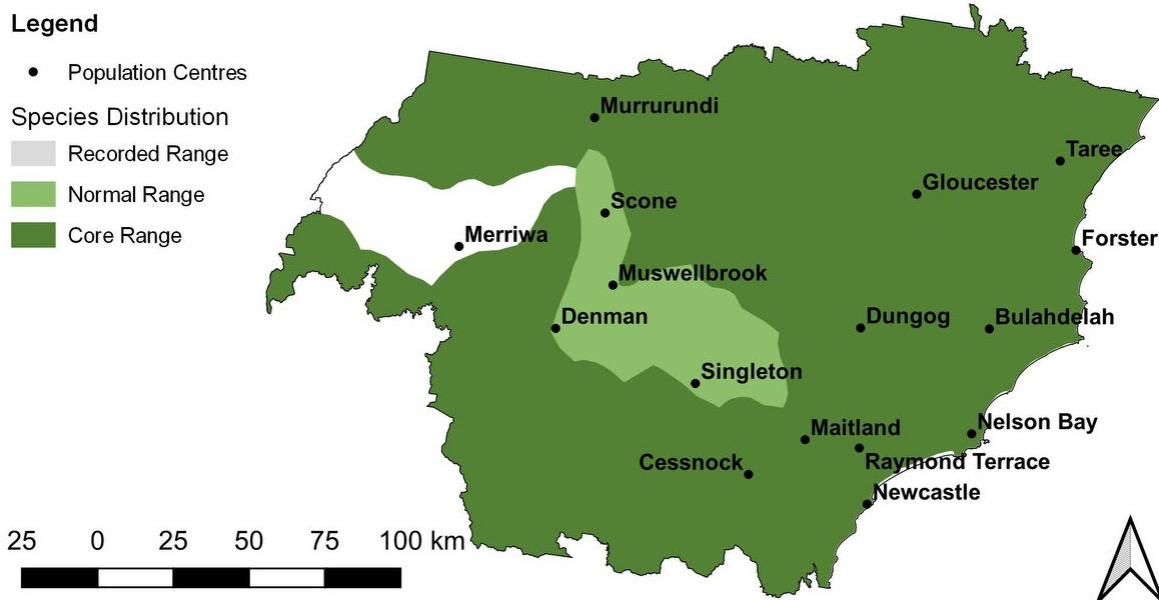
Males and females are almost identical – both have a bright yellow breast and belly, white throat, and grey upperparts. In flight, a white wing-bar and

yellowish rump are obvious features. However, males are 10-20% larger than females – e.g. they are bulkier and have larger wingspans.

Juveniles are brown birds with white streakings and spots. They are robin-shaped, but otherwise quite different in appearance to the adults. At the age of about three months, they begin to moult into adult-type plumage although it takes a few more months before the white spots on the wing disappear.

Regional Status

The Eastern Yellow Robin is a common breeding resident in our region. It has a widespread distribution – occurring wherever there are medium to large areas of woodland or rainforest habitat.



Distribution of the Eastern Yellow Robin in the Hunter Region (map by Dan Williams)

Not much movement!

In bird banding studies conducted over 1984-2001, 99.9% of birds had stayed within 10km of their original banding location – only four birds had gone further including one which had travelled 49km. The mean distance travelled by dispersing young birds was only 219m, although one occasion a banded young bird re-appeared 2.5km from its banding location.

Such studies have not been conducted locally (or, alas, not reported). However, in July 2019 a young female (with a bright yellow rump) was present on Broughton Island. For the bird to have got there, it would have crossed several kilometres of open water.



Two young Eastern Yellow Robins (photo: Alan Stuart)

Longevity

Helped by the sedentary nature of this species, there are many longevity records. The oldest-documented bird was aged almost 15 years at the date of its most recent recapture in July 2022 (Corella 2023). There are many reports of individuals confirmed to be ten or more years of age.

Sub-species

There are two sub-species: *australis* (South-eastern Yellow Robin) and *chrysorrhos* (North-eastern Yellow Robin). Their most obvious difference is in the rump – it is greenish yellow for *australis* and bright yellow for *chrysorrhos*. Although both rump types are often observed locally, the situation is not as it might at first seem. Birds south of the Hunter Valley are genuine *australis* subspecies and birds north of the Clarence Valley are genuine *chrysorrhos* subspecies. We are in an area of intergrade – there possibly are no “pure” *chrysorrhos* birds in our region and “pure” *australis* birds probably only occur in the far western parts of it (if at all).

About the name

Eastern Yellow Robin

In England there is a common and widespread flycatcher with a red-breast,

that acquired a human “first name” Robin (and later, it came to be called Robin Redbreast) in the late 14th or early 15th century. Whenever red-breasted birds with similar behaviours to the English species were encountered in newly-settled colonies, these birds also became called robins even though there was no close relationship to the English species. And then, similar birds but without a red breast (e.g. yellow ones and black and white ones) were added into the fold. The remainder of the name is straightforward – it has a lot of yellow, and there are western and eastern species.

Eopsaltria australis

The genus name means dawn harpist, from the Greek *ēōs*, dawn, and *psaltria*, a female harp player. This name reflects the prominent vocal role by this species in the dawn chorus (and pre-dawn). The species name is the Latin word for “southern”.



An adult Eastern Yellow Robin striking a typical pose (photo: Rob Palazzi)

Design Rob Kyte at Conservation Matters 0420 821 460 Text by Alan Stuart based on information mainly sourced from • HBOC’s Hunter Region annual bird report series • Volumes 1-7 of BirdLife Australia’s HANZAB (the Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds) • Volumes 1-3 of the NSW Field Atlassers’ Atlas of the Birds of NSW and the ACT • Bird in the Hand (ABSA information sheet series) • Menkhorst et al. (2017). The Australian Bird Guide • Ian Fraser & Jeannie Gray (2013). Australian Bird Names. A Complete

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