

Red-browed Treecreeper

Climacteris erythrops

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A female Red-browed Treecreeper – note the rusty-streaked upper breast (photo: Bruce Watts)

Description

Superficially this species resembles the similarly-sized White-throated Treecreeper and the two species often co-occur, so care must be taken with the ID. Adults have a rusty-red eye patch, which is diagnostic but it is fairly easily overlooked and it is absent in juveniles. There are two other important plumage differences between these two treecreeper species. Red-browed Treecreepers have a brown saddle (middle part of back) which stands out against the grey neck, rump and tail, whereas White-throated Treecreepers are uniformly coloured grey-brown on their upper parts. Also, the undertail of the Red-browed Treecreeper is boldly streaked, strikingly more so than for the

White-throated Treecreeper, and there is streaking right across the breast, to the throat area.

The Red-browed Treecreeper has a white throat – it's a relatively small area of white for males but it's a much larger one for females. So it's important to remember those other diagnostic features because a white throat is a pointer for both species (although note that for White-throated Treecreeper, the area of white extends onto the breast).

Males and females are similar; an important difference is that females have a patch of rufous-brown and white streaking on their upper breast. Juveniles are quite tricky to identify. They lack the red brow and lores of adults and they only have muted streaking in the tail underparts, and none of it on the breast. Their bill is paler than that of adult birds – it's more of a grey/cream colour rather than black. The main way to differentiate a juvenile Red-browed Treecreeper from a White-throated Treecreeper is that its front parts are almost uniformly grey, apart from some streaking in the tail underparts and a small whitish throat. Juveniles attain adult plumage within around two months of fledging, but they often retain juvenile-like bill and pale gape until into their second year.

Red-browed Treecreepers practice cooperative breeding. Only the females incubate; they are attended by the male and a few helper males who bring food.

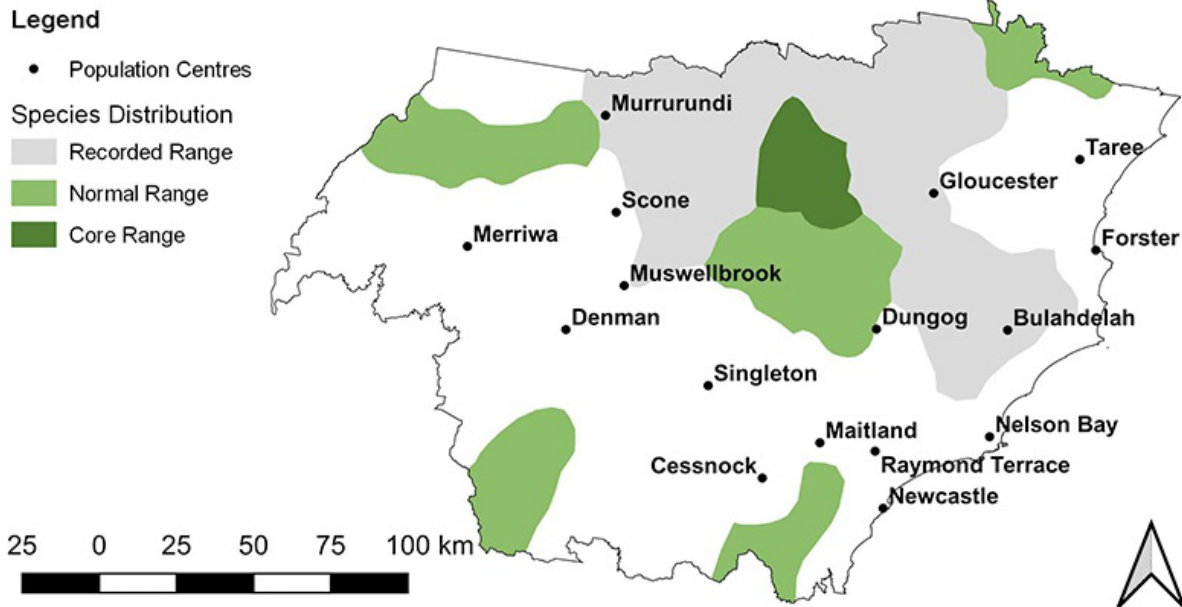


A male Red-browed Treecreeper – with no rusty-brown streaking on the upper breast (photo: Allan Richardson)

Regional Status

The Red-browed Treecreeper is resident in the Hunter Region. Although most records have been from higher altitude locations (Barrington and Gloucester Tops, Coolah Tops, Watagans, etc) they may be found wherever there are emergent gum trees, particularly smooth-barked ones. (Emergent: the tree's upper trunk and crown tower above the main canopy). Because of its preference to use the higher parts of tall trees, the species probably is under-recorded especially by people who are unfamiliar with its distinctive "chatterly" call.

Local breeding records are infrequent but that probably reflects a lack of any close study, plus its preference to forage high in the canopy.



Distribution map for Red-browed treecreeper (map prepared by Dan Williams)

Differentiating the local treecreepers

In the Hunter Region we have three species of treecreeper – Red-browed, White-throated and Brown Treecreeper. There are plumage similarities for the three species and that has led to many probable mis-identifications. There isn't space here to go into details of the plumage differences. However, there are some non-plumage clues that help get to the correct ID. Firstly, habitat. Brown Treecreepers are predominantly found in dry woodland habitat, and Red-browed in tall eucalypt forest with emergent trees. White-throated Treecreepers are more versatile in the habitats they use (thus, they can co-occur with either of the two other treecreepers, but Red-browed and Brown are unlikely to co-occur). Also, Brown Treecreepers are more likely to be found on the ground or towards the base of a trunk, whereas Red-browed are more likely to be up high in the canopy and White-throated are more likely to be at around the mid-height. It must be stressed that this height-preference is not a hard and fast rule but it's a useful guide. And finally, the calls of these three species are quite different – practice learning bird calls whenever you can.



Red-browed Treecreeper – showing the brown saddle on its back and rusty-brown eyebrow and lores (photo: Allan Richardson)

About the name

Red-browed Treecreeper

In the early days of Australian ornithology, our treecreepers were thought to be members of the Northern Hemisphere family *Certhiidae*, which are variously known as treecreepers and creepers – they were so named because of their distinctive foraging behaviour. Now it is recognised that Australian “treecreepers” are members of an ancient group that is unrelated to the northern birds. “Red-browed” is descriptive, although imperfectly so – the lores as well as the brow are rusty-red (for adult birds).

Climacteris erythroptera

The genus name *Climacteris* comes from two related Greek words *klimax*, a stairway or ladder, and *klimakter*, a rung. This is a direct reference to the habit of this genus of spiralling up tree trunks. *Erythroptera* is from the Greek words *erythros*, red, and *ōps*, eye or face.

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 HANZAB (the Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds) • 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 Guide • Richard Schodde and Ian Mason (1999). A Directory of Australian Birds (Passerines).
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