

Feather Fascination!

with local Birdwatcher,

Jim Butler **Oz and Song Birds: The True Story**

THE flamboyant Leaden Flycatcher (15 cm) is a little beauty! It is distributed from northern Western Australia across the top of Australia and down the east coast to southern Victoria. It is highly migratory in winter, moving north from Victoria to Queensland and on to PNG. In Brisbane the population is a mixture of residents and migrants. It is strongly dimorphic: the male has a dark throat and the female a rufous throat. What's in a name? The Leaden Flycatcher is insectivorous! Which implies that it is very active and agile as it pursues insects in flight. When momentarily perched high in the canopy it waves its tail rapidly in a figure of eight to disturb insects (diagnostic feature). It is highly vocal and is best found by listening for its call from high in the canopy.



The Leaden is one of six Flycatchers in Australia; all with descriptive names: Satin, Restless, Shining, Paperbark, and Broad-billed. The latter three are not in Brisbane. The Flycatchers are significant because their DNA demonstrates that Australia has played a major part in bird evolution. Flycatchers are members of the "song birds" (47% of world's bird species) which originated in Australia and from here radiated throughout the globe. Song birds are those with complex calls that are partly learned. The great American ornithologist, Sibley, who was in our region during World War II, was the first to show that the birds that "sing songs" throughout the world originated in Australia. This conclusion was at first totally ignored by the northern hemisphere ornithologists who assumed that all the European and American song birds had originated there. Eventually, the DNA evidence became

overwhelming and it is now confidently asserted that the northern hemisphere songbirds are descendants of birds which lived in Australia 45 million years ago and then radiated northwards. This conclusion was only generally accepted as recently as 2004.

Look for a bird high in the canopy waving its tail!

~ Jim



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Digital Bird Guide:
<http://www.moggillcreek.org/>

Image: Male and female
Leaden Flycatchers
by Ed Frazer at Brookfield