

Revisiting history: the case of the Wet Tropics Yellow-legged Flycatcher

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Abstract

Unconfirmed field reports of the Australian Yellow-legged Flycatcher *Kempiella griseiceps kemp* in the Wet Tropics present unresolved issues in some formal and informal publications on north Queensland birds, although there are no verified specimens or photographs south of Cape York Peninsula rainforest. Using published and unpublished sources, we review the basis of records in the Wet Tropics from 1931 to 1987 and consider the materials and experience available to assist observer identifications, and their reliance on prior reports from the region. The descriptions of foraging behaviour, calls, plumage, and bill and leg colours of supposed Yellow-legged Flycatchers are consistent with features of – and arguably were – adult or immature Northern Pale-yellow Robins *Tregellasia capito nana*. We report the withdrawal of one longstanding Yellow-legged Flycatcher record, and recommend that all remaining records in the Wet Tropics should be rejected and excluded from accounts of their distribution and behaviour. Future field observations in the region would benefit from improved documentation of variations in bill and plumage colours of immature Pale-yellow Robins.

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Introduction

The Yellow-legged Flycatcher (YLF) *Kempiella griseiceps* is sedentary and rainforest dependent, also utilising the ecotone with adjacent, more open habitats (Higgins & Peter 2002; Beehler & Pratt 2016). It occurs throughout New Guinea as a mid-montane species (Beehler & Pratt 2016). The range of the Australian YLF *K. g. kemp* is routinely shown as Cape York Peninsula (CYP: see Methods for definition) south to the McIlwraith Range (e.g. Storr 1984; Higgins & Peter 2002; Barrett *et al.* 2003), but supposed historical records from the Wet Tropics persist in the literature as requiring corroboration (e.g. Schodde & Mason 1999; Higgins & Peter 2002; Boles 2020). Its occurrence in the Wet Tropics – isolated from the nearest

population by more than 300 km of savannah woodland – implies a relict population surviving over millennia, undiscovered despite collecting and field studies in the region since the 1880s. There are no verified specimens or photographs south of CYP (Boles 1980; Schodde & Mason 1999; Nielsen 2013). Of two possible specimens from the Wet Tropics, one is doubtful due to possible mislabelling (Schodde & Mason 1999) and the other (destroyed in 1947: Boles 1980) is discussed below. Despite lack of verification the suggestion that the species could occur (or could formerly have occurred) in the Wet Tropics has been given weight, due especially to respect for the experience of key past observers (e.g. Officer 1969;

Noske & Sticklen 1979; Nielsen 2013). The YLF account in Higgins and Peter (2002) states that records south of CYP need confirmation, but nevertheless includes observations of calls and foraging by supposed YLF in the Wet Tropics (White 1946; Bourke & Austin 1947; Bravery 1970).

When records of YLF south of CYP were claimed by Mayo (1931) and by others in the 1940s, the species was almost unknown. The first Australian specimen was collected by R. Kemp (*contra* W. McLennan of Mack 1953) near Paira, CYP (10°44'S, 142°33'E) in 1913. The first description was by Mathews (1913-1915) as a full species *Kempiella kemp*, although the New Guinea taxon had already been described as *Microeca griseiceps* by De Vis (1894). Later Mathews described the Australian

specimen as a subspecies, *K. g. kemp* (Mathews 1927: see Methods for names used here). Accurate illustrations are an important aid for observers to distinguish between similar species and identify birds. The first large colour plate of YLF was by H. Grönvold (Mathews 1920, Fig. 1). The earliest field guide to include YLF (Leach 1926) gave no illustration, but noted the yellow feet and bi-coloured bill. The first field guide illustration was small, and did not show the legs (Cayley 1931, 1958). Further large illustrations were published by Mack (1953) and Officer (1969); the first large illustration in a field guide was by Slater (1973). Photographs of YLF (albeit limited) only became readily available in 1988 (Boles 1988).



Figure 1. H. Grönvold's lithograph of the Yellow-legged Flycatcher *Kempiella griseiceps* (upper), Pale-yellow Robin *Tregellasia capito* (centre) and White-faced Robin *T. leucops* (lower): Mathews (1920).

For much of the 20th century the whole range was still not well-known even for many common birds, and more so for species with restricted, little-surveyed ranges such as YLF on northern CYP. McGill (1948) criticised brief distribution statements in field guides and bird lists as “misleading”, and called for better definitions of ranges and habitats: he hoped field records could fill gaps in patchy distribution maps based on specimen locations. ‘Cape York’ was interpreted broadly: popular nature writing (e.g. Devaney 1927) and scientific literature (e.g. Favalaro 1931; Brass 1953), did not clearly distinguish CYP rainforest in the Iron and McIlwraith Ranges from that in the northern Wet Tropics. Bourke and Austin (1947, p 93) regarded the Tablelands as the southerly section of CYP. The first distribution map for YLF was published by Officer (1969), who included the Atherton Tablelands due to records by “impeccable” observers (see Discussion), but noted the expanse of savannah woodland between the Tablelands and CYP rainforest (Fig. 2).

Apparently the only information on YLF behaviour within its accepted Australian range until a brief note by Officer (1967), was Macgillivray’s (1918, p 197) description of YLF calls and foraging on the Claudie River. This was cited by Mathews (1920) and repeated in field guides for over fifty years: “This bird has the ways of a Flycatcher, making short flights from branchlet to branchlet and occasionally into the air to capture a passing insect, all the time uttering a subdued piping call which resembles ‘Zzt, zzt, zzt’ given out in a low tone and repeatedly”.

Historically, editors did not insist on substantial (or in some cases, any) evidence for publication of even rare sightings. Acceptance of unusual sightings, including significant range extensions, depended primarily on the reputation of the observer (Maryland Ornithological Society 2020). ‘Rarities Committees’ were introduced in the 1950s in Europe (Dean 2007), in 1975 for Australia (BirdLife Australia 2020) and in Queensland in 1995 (Gynther & Pell 1999). Since then approaches to unevidenced, or barely evidenced, historical records have ranged from militant rejection in the 1990s, e.g. Association of European Records and Rarities Committees (AERRC 2020); to assessing the conservation risks of rejection vs. acceptance, taking other historical materials into account (Leseberg *et al.* 2020).

As detailed by Nielsen (2013), the most likely species overlooked by observers reporting YLF in suitable habitat in the Wet Tropics is the Northern Pale-yellow Robin, *Tregellasia capito nana* (PYR). Early field guide illustrations (Cayley 1931, 1958) were small but adequate; the first readily available large images were in Officer (1969) and Slater (1973). All editions of Cayley (e.g. 1931, 1958) stated that PYR food is “caught in the air or on the ground” (see also Officer 1969). Later, detailed studies quantified considerable time spent foraging by PYR in foliage, at times catching prey in the air (Crome 1978; Frith 1984). Cayley (1958) was the first field guide to note that PYR often cling to the side of tree trunks, behaviour enabled by much stronger feet and tarsus than in *Microeca* and *Kempiella* flycatchers, which are aerial feeders with weaker tarsus and claws (Mayr 1941; Vaurie 1953).

One of us (BJW) observed birds on the Atherton Tablelands in 1967, originally identified and reported as YLF (Noske & Sticklen 1979). From reviewing the original field notes (Appendix 1), including perching behaviour (consistent with PYR, and not YLF, leg morphology: see above), BJW now considers these birds to have been PYR. Other contributing factors to this decision include that his previous experience was with the larger Southern PYR *T. c. capito*; and subsequent understanding of aerial and canopy foraging by PYR (e.g. Crome 1978; F. Crome, personal communication). BJW’s identification of nest-building birds on CYP in 1973 as YLF, stands (Noske & Sticklen 1979).

In this paper we assess the likelihood of YLF occurring in the Wet Tropics based on the remaining historical records – including unpublished notes by A.F. Austin and J.A. Bravery – and the influence of early reports on subsequent observers. We also discuss approaches to historical records that fail more rigorous modern appraisal standards, in the case of the Yellow-legged Flycatcher.

Methods

We discarded two claimed YLF records from inappropriate habitat (woodland or open forest far from rainforest): neither provided reasons for identification but we presume these to have been misidentified Lemon-bellied Flycatcher *M. flavigaster* (Goode & Goode 1941; Officer 1969). We also discarded an online report of YLF from the Cassowary Coast (Birds Queensland 2021) which was not submitted to the Birds Queensland (BQ)

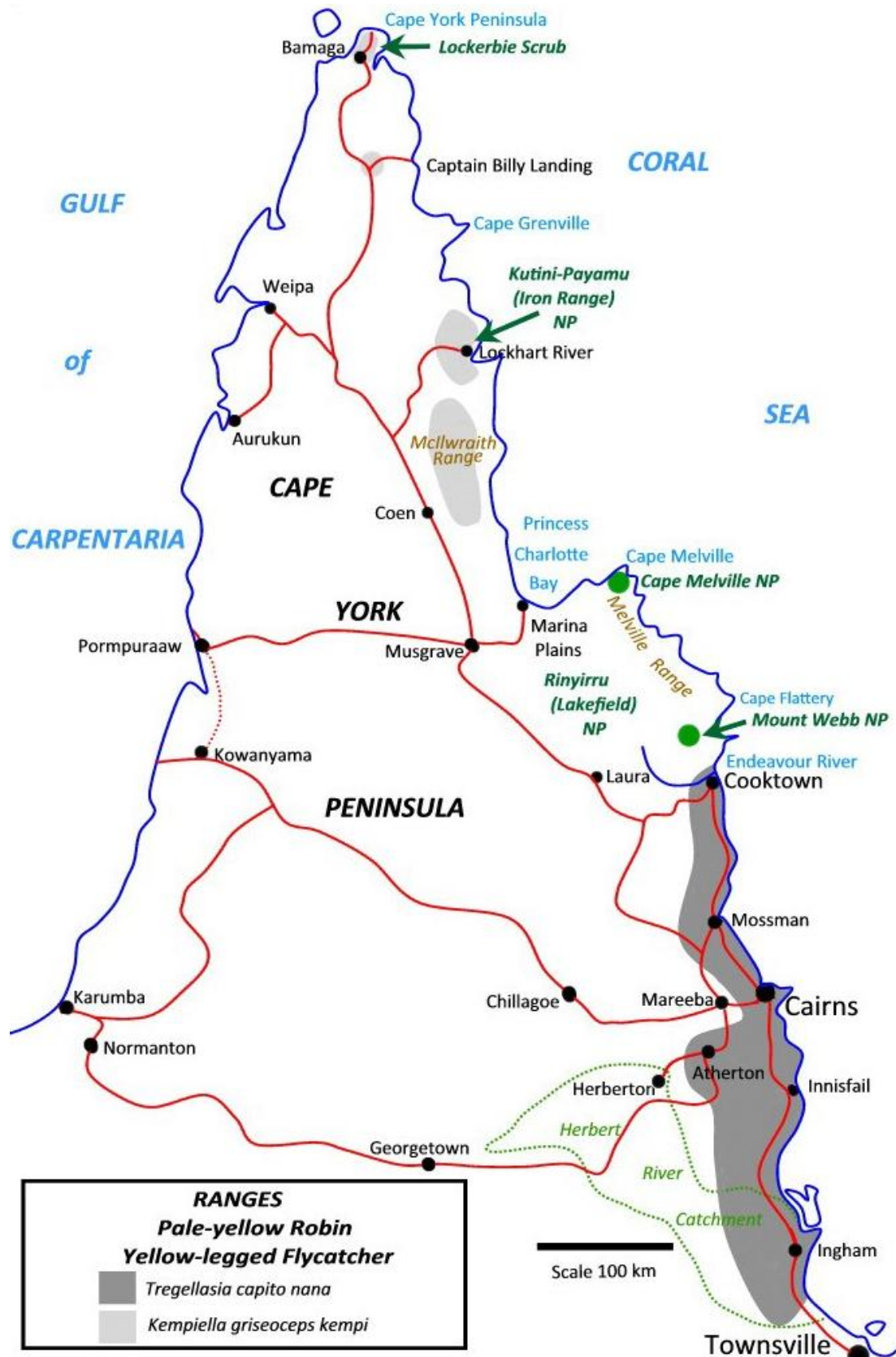


Figure 2. Range of the Pale-yellow Robin (PYR) in the Wet Tropics (Cooktown to north of Townsville) and of Yellow-legged Flycatcher (YLF) on northern Cape York Peninsula (CYP). PYR is common in suitable habitat within its range; YLF is uncommon in CYP rainforest. The Claudie River is at Lockhart River township.

Records Appraisal Committee, but was informally reviewed and rejected (D. Stewart, personal communication; LN). For claimed records in suitable habitat (Mayo 1931; White 1946; Bourke & Austin 1947; Bravery 1970; Nagle 1987) we sought unpublished notes or diaries and/or personal communications for further details of the observations, including criteria used for identification. Accounts in field guides or other aids used by observers and the extent of their field experience in relevant habitats, and with YLF and PYR, were sought from literature, club activity reports, archived newspapers (via Trove), and (for military personnel) from the National Archives of Australia (NAA).

We assessed these records against the requirements of the BQ Records Appraisal Committee for a significant range extension (Gynther & Pell 1999; Birds Queensland 2019). Apart from general details such as date and location, the Committee requires two questions to be answered fully:

1. Description of bird (Describe what you saw/heard, e.g. size and shape, comparative size of body parts, plumage, colour of eyes, colour/length of bill and legs, call, age, sex, etc. Attach copies of any sketches or field notes made).
2. How was it distinguished from similar species?

For YLF and PYR (ssp. *nana*, including juveniles and immatures), we searched the literature and online databases for descriptions and images of field characters, and examined images provided by K. Fisher and J.D.A. Grant. We compared the calls of YLF and PYR by listening to recordings (xeno-canto 2020), and compared them with the descriptions of calls in the historical records.

Bird scientific and common names are from BirdLife Australia (2019). [Note: Atlas of Living Australia (2020) and eBird (2020a) retain YLF in *Microeca*, with *Kempiella* as a synonym. However BirdLife International (2021) and Beehler & Pratt (2016) among others accept *Kempiella* for the YLF and a sister taxon in New Guinea, based on molecular studies by Christidis *et al.* (2011)]. We defined the southern boundary of CYP as approximately 16°S (State of Queensland 2020), but excluding coastal areas near Cooktown which are part of the Wet Tropics Bioregion. Unpublished materials cited as 'Diary' are those presented in

Appendix 1. Quotations are verbatim, except where ellipses indicate omitted text; square brackets indicate our additions.

Results

Diary entries relating to YLF recorded by A.F. Austin, B.J. Wallace and J.A. Bravery at the time of their observations are shown in Appendix 1, together with extracts from letters by A.F. Austin. Note however, that Austin was killed in action in 1945 (NAA 2020). Bourke combined their notes when writing after WW2 (Bourke & Austin 1947), but the final version of Austin's notes, sent to Bourke in early 1945, has not been located (Ian J. Mason, personal communication). No unpublished documents were available for other observers. Paul Nagle (personal communication) provided the additional information that his mist-netting study near Ravenshoe (Nagle 1987) was conducted in 1986, in about August.

Identifications and criteria

Details of observers and the criteria reported to support their identifications are shown in Table 1. All claimed records of YLF in the Wet Tropics were within the range of the PYR (Fig. 2). Only one record (Nagle 1987) included a detailed physical description, meeting the first requirement for the BQ Records Appraisal Committee (see Methods). No record sufficiently excluded other species, in particular PYR. Thus, no historical record would meet current conditions for a significant range extension in Queensland. Two observers gave no identification criteria, while three treated behaviour alone (stirring insects from foliage and/or taking insects on the wing) as diagnostic for YLF. Austin (Diary) accepted only YLF and excluded PYR altogether from his north Queensland bird list. Two observers (Bourke & Austin 1947; Bravery Diary) described calls. Apparently no observer had experience of YLF within its accepted range before first claiming a sighting in the Wet Tropics (Table 1; ECS unpublished data). Bravery was accompanied by a field companion during both his observations, but neither had prior experience of YLF, or of PYR in the Wet Tropics (ECS unpublished data). No other observer reported a field companion. Nagle (1987) hoped for "independent confirmation" of his record, but none eventuated.

Some observers expressed a preference for behavioural cues over other field characters. Bourke and Austin (1947, p 102) denied the utility

Table 1. Reports of Yellow-legged Flycatcher in suitable habitat south of Cape York Peninsula.

All are field records, except for one mist-netted bird (Nagle 1987). Diary excerpts are in Appendix 1.

Date	Observer	Location	Did observer record Pale-yellow Robin (PYR)?	Descriptions	
				Physical	'YLF' Behaviour
Nov 1930	Lila Mayo (Mayo 1931)	Lake Barrine	Yes, same location	No	No
Aug 1944-Dec 1945	Stan White (White 1946)	Lower Barron River; N of Cairns ¹ ; Mossman	Yes, once: one bird at Barron Gorge	No	Taking insects on wing (for 1/3 records)
Apr 1943-Mar 1945	Frank Austin (Diary)	Evelyn Scrubs	No (stated <i>not</i> recorded: Diary)	No	No
Apr 1943-Mar 1945	Pat Bourke (Bourke & Austin 1947)	Various	Yes: PYR "more in Herbert catchment", YLF "north of the Herbert"	No	Taking insects on wing; "hissing, piping" calls and a loud double whistle (alarm call)
May 1965 & Oct 1973	Jim Bravery (Bravery 1970; Diary)	Lake Eacham; Wongabel	Yes, same locations and "common" in the area	Yellowish legs	Taking insects on wing; calls "twittering, not piping"
1987	Paul Nagle (Nagle 1987)	5 km SE of Ravenshoe	Yes, same location	Bright yellow legs, grey head, white throat, lower bill lighter colour than upper	n.a. (mist-netted bird)

¹Probably Trinity Beach

of morphological characters to distinguish YLF from PYR in the "poorly-lit scrub", as "size and colouration...are at best, a faulty guide in the field". Bravery likewise preferred to identify at least some birds based on behaviour: "... the idea of seeing all the Flycatchers or Honeyeaters is not important, you have to know what they do in the field" (letter to A.H. Chisholm, 10 September 1969: State Library of New South Wales 2020).

Regarding ranges, Bourke and Austin (1947) considered that YLF replaced PYR north of the Herbert catchment (Fig. 2), i.e. that PYR occurred only south of ~17°19'S. Austin's personal notes (Diary) illustrate the contemporary lack of distinction between rainforest in the Wet Tropics and on CYP. He listed YLF and White-faced Robin

Tregellasia leucops as possible species for the Wet Tropics, although field guides at the time (e.g. Cayley 1931) gave ranges for both species only on northern CYP. Bravery had a flexible attitude to avian ranges: "It is surprising how often a stranger will turn up and upset the general laid down areas of distribution. I am elastic regarding distribution and many times I have seen species supposed not to frequent the far north" (unpublished diary note, 23 October 1962).

Identification resources

There are few YLF specimens in Australian collections (ALA 2020) and no observers were in a position to examine skins close to the time of their field observations. Mayo was probably the only observer with access to major library collections

holding works such as Mathews (1920), but there is no evidence she consulted references in this instance (Mayo 1931; ECS unpublished data). A.F. Austin had the Cayley (1931) field guide and possibly Leach (1926) (Appendix 1). It is not known which field guides were used by Bourke and White but Cayley (1931) was in common use amongst troops stationed on the Atherton Tablelands and near Cairns (e.g. Leask 1945). In the Cayley second edition (1958) editors A.H. Chisholm, K.A. Hindwood and A.R. McGill significantly extended the southern range from CYP to the Atherton Tablelands. This edition was used by one of us (BJW) and Bravery (Diary). No observer used a camera, or tape to record calls. Nagle (1987) cited the Slater (1973) guide.

The Nagle (1987) mist-netted bird

Nagle (1987) described a bird with bright yellow legs, grey head, white throat, and lower bill a lighter colour than the upper. Inspection of photographs of PYR from the Wet Tropics showed that immatures develop some white under the throat before attaining the full white throat of adult plumage. As with Eastern Yellow Robin *Eopsaltria australis* (Higgins & Peter 2002), there are variable areas of cream to pale yellow colour on the mandibles of immature PYRs, and Mathews (1920) noted that the bill of the immature PYR is black, with yellow edges on the lower mandible (see also Frith & Frith 2005). There are also varying degrees of grey plumage on the head (Mathews 1920; Taylor 2013; Anon. 2016, 2017; eBird 2020b; K. Fisher, J.D.A. Grant unpublished). Photographs show PYR legs from greyish-yellow or greyish-pink (see also text of Slater 1973) to yellow-orange (as noted by Higgins and Peter 2002). It is unknown precisely how long immature bill colour persists, but a bird fledged in the months preceding August could still show immature characters, including the bi-coloured lower mandible (J.D.A. Grant personal communication). On this basis, we consider that the description by Nagle (1987) – although the only detailed description for any historical claimed YLF record in the Wet Tropics – is not sufficient to differentiate the bird from an immature PYR.

Calls

Bravery's (Diary) description of "twittering" is consistent with published descriptions of PYR calls (e.g. Cayley 1931, 1958; Slater 1973; Higgins & Peter 2002). The "hissing, grating" of Bourke and

Austin (1947) appears similar to calls of PYR described by Higgins and Peter (2002), BJW (Appendix 1) and from recordings (xeno-canto 2020). We found no analogue for the "loud clear double whistle" alarm call reported by Bourke and Austin (1947); the description does not apply to any call of YLF or PYR, and may have been made by an unseen bird nearby.

Discussion

Early birdwatchers reporting the YLF were in effect field pioneers, with few resources to support bird identification, as noted by Noske (2017) for WW2 military ornithologists in the Top End of the Northern Territory. It is significant that the WW2 authors claiming YLF records in the Wet Tropics (White 1946; Bourke & Austin 1947; Austin Diary) overlooked the wide range and common status of PYR in the region, known since at least 1901 (North 1901-1904) and confirmed by e.g. H.B. Gill (1970: in observations from 1954). Those with previous experience of the southern subspecies may have been misled by the smaller size of the Wet Tropics bird. White (1946) believed he had seen YLF three times and PYR only once in some 20 months of birdwatching while based in Cairns. White and Austin may have reinforced each other's views: they went birding on at least two occasions (White 1946, pp 105,107), including to "jungle north of Cairns", a site where White 'recorded' the YLF (and see Austin's Letters, Appendix 1). Writings of the three WW2 observers do not suggest they encountered an isolated, relict population of YLF, rather, that they were unable to recognise PYR, a widespread common species, over much of its Wet Tropics range. Reasons for the discrepancy between Austin's diary notes and the published account are not known, but Bourke must have been at a disadvantage when writing without being able to consult his co-author.

The absence of PYR from Austin's (Diary) bird list must cast doubt on his identification of the 'YLF' specimen destroyed as "worthless" in 1947 (Boles 1980; O.37664 Australian Museum). Even so, Austin's comment (Letter 15 March 1945: Appendix 1) that the specimen "in fact was" [YLF] implies that he believed the Australian Museum had supported his identification. The sceptical "ornithological friends" who doubted this are unknown: White (1946) and Bourke (Bourke & Austin 1947) both considered they had seen the

YLF, based on foraging behaviour. At the time the Australian Museum had 18 specimens of PYR ssp. *nana*, but none of YLF (ALA 2020). Under war conditions it is unlikely the Museum could have viewed or borrowed the few specimens held elsewhere, for comparison: for example the South Australian Museum collection was stored underground (offsite) for safety until mid-1944, and key staff were away until the end of the war (Horton *et al.* 2018).

Bravery's conviction that the birds he saw were not PYR, due to their extensive aerial foraging, could have been influenced by an increase in such behaviour due to the birds' participating in a mixed feeding flock (Diary). PYRs regularly join such flocks moving through their home ranges in the Wet Tropics (Wilson & Wilson 2018) and while within the flock, could forage primarily on the wing to catch insects disturbed by other flock members. Similarly, changes in foraging behaviour have been noted in other species in mixed flocks (Bell 1983; Wilson & Wilson 2018).

Bourke & Austin's (1947) paper was highly influential. The editors of the Cayley (1958) revision incorporated 'YLF' behavioural notes from the 1947 paper, and it was undoubtedly the source of their decision to extend the YLF range south from the Claudie River to the Atherton Tablelands. White's (1946) coastal records probably also had an influence. Bravery (1970, Diary, ECS unpublished data) used Bourke & Austin (1947) as a guide to searching the Tablelands for bird species and was greatly respectful of Bourke's expertise: he consulted Bourke over a number of years on bird identifications. Bravery, in turn, influenced others (e.g. Noske & Sticklen 1979; Nielsen 2013). Officer (1969) was cautious about the presence of YLF on the Atherton Tablelands but was influenced by "at least two [unnamed] observers of impeccable reliability". However Bourke & Austin's (1947) account and Bravery's diary (Appendix 1) reveal competent, conscientious observers struggling to distinguish PYR from YLF due to lack of quality identification aids. The chain of citations through each successive published report after 1947 – despite disclaimers of Wet Tropics YLF records being 'unproved' (Blakers *et al.* 1984) – illustrates a social process noted by Frith (1994) whereby extraordinary but unsupported published records, and respect for prior observers, create an

expectation that the species concerned could (or even 'should') be seen outside its verified range.

Leseberg *et al.* (2020) have convincingly argued that unevidenced, rare historical sightings should not be lightly discarded as "scientifically worthless" and "burdening the literature" (AERRC 2020), and we have shown that applying key criteria of a relevant records appraisal system to published and unpublished materials can illuminate unresolved, problematic sight records. The YLF is uncommon, but listed as 'Least Concern' (BirdLife International 2021); thus the rejection or acceptance of southern records may not have conservation significance (*c.f.* Night Parrot *Pezoporus occidentalis*: Leseberg *et al.* 2020). Nevertheless, there is an opportunity cost in failing to scrutinise and determine the standing of claimed YLF records in the Wet Tropics. The need to corroborate these sightings is regarded as 'unfinished business' (e.g. Schodde & Mason 1999; Higgins & Peter 2002; Boles 2020). More importantly, the ecology and behaviour of the YLF in Australia is still not well known. Explicitly or *de facto* accepting descriptions of foraging behaviour and calls observed in the Wet Tropics (e.g. Higgins & Peter 2002) – which we argue should be attributed to PYR – could be misleading, and obscures how little we know about the YLF. Claims of undiscovered relict populations demand significant evidence such as specimens or quality digital images. We consider that all existing records of YLF in the Wet Tropics should be rejected and excluded from accounts of its distribution and behaviour. Field observations in the region would benefit from better documentation of variations in bill and plumage colours of immature PYRs.

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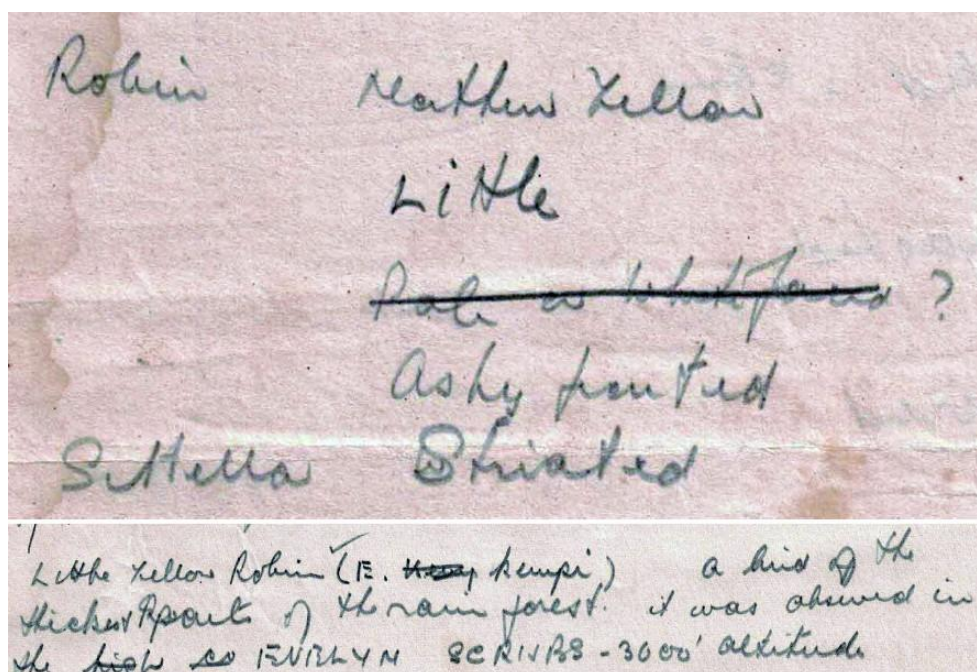
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Appendix 1. Field notes by observers reporting Yellow-legged Flycatcher in the Wet Tropics.

Diary notes by A. Frank Austin, 1944-1945 (courtesy A. Frank Austin Jnr.)



Excerpts from letters written by A. Frank Austin to his wife Helen, in NSW (courtesy of, and with notes by, A. Frank Austin Jnr.)

- 27 October 1942: "Have you a copy of Leach's 'An Australian Bird Book'. He is wonderful for identifying birds I think and much better than Cayley"
- 24 March 1943: Mentions Stan White RAAF F/O, who appears to be writing a similar paper
- 5 July 1943: "Dr J Marshall in a show near here" and "I cannot wait till I can see him" [ornithologist Capt. Dr 'Jock' Marshall]. AFA asked his wife to send a copy of Cayley.
- 16 July 1943: "Cayley arrived safely – thank you very much. Already it has been most helpful."
- 26 November 1943: "Met RAAF P/O White, knew his birds from A to Z. Wish I had contacted him earlier."
- 2 June 1944: "Got in touch with Cpl Pat Bourke."
- 15 March 1945: Re skin specimens sent to the Australian Museum "...and a yellow robin which I have always maintained to be the *Kempellia kempii*, in fact was. My ornithological friends poopooed this."

Diary notes by Ben J. Wallace, 1 and 2 January 1967: now identified as Pale-yellow Robin (this paper)

Atherton Tableland; 4 miles N. Malanda. First identified on the edge of the road in rainforest. Inhabited an apparently defined territory about 80 yds x 50 yds, the long axis being centred on the road. The niche occupied by the bird appeared to be wholly within the canopy of the jungle as it remained in this area for four hours of observation. The flycatcher feeding behaviour was well noted – the bird remained on its perch for a short time – a few seconds to about 4 or five minutes – either remained still and silent, or preened then made a short flight of about 6 – 40 ft to capture some airborne insect and then perch again.

The Robin type behaviour was thus: in the second period of observation, of two hours, the bird perched sideways on perpendicular branches eight times in the typical *Eopsaltria* fashion; occasionally the bird flicked its wings and tail as does *E. australis*. The call was heard on three occasions, perhaps best described as a nasal “zzp zzp”, the general sound quality being reminiscent of the grating calls of *E. australis*.

Diary notes by James A. Bravery, 27 October 1973¹

...we saw a pair of Little Yellow Robins. These were in a mixed party and some time was spent checking them for accuracy of identification; about as big as Lemon-breasted Flycatcher and some resemblance at a casual glance, however these two had different feeding habits they fed by stirring insects from the outer foliage flying out often to catch one, they certainly are more like warblers feeding than Robins or Flycatchers. The yellowish legs make a good field mark as they fed some twittering was heard but no piping calls like other local Robins with a check of the Field Guide [Cayley 1958] identity was correct. The reason for the confusion of this species is the feeding habits which are more like Thornbills or Warblers and not Flycatchers or Robins. A mystery bird who [sic] is hard to find and when found creates much uncertainty. This was in good light in swamp woodland at Scrubby Creek area of Wongabel...a rare species which is regarded as a Cape York species however Bourke & Austin and myself know it is on the Tableland.

¹Bravery's diaries contain one other record, in May 1965 at Lake Eacham, but there are no sighting notes