

# Woodlands on the Wing

Issue 3 Autumn 2013

*The Great Western Woodlands is the world's largest remaining temperate woodland. BirdLife Australia is partnering with The Nature Conservancy to establish a long-term monitoring project in the woodlands to assess species distribution, population status, movements and ecology of bird species in the region, to better inform conservation and management of this significant region. This project has been made possible through the generous support of the David Thomas Challenge and individual BirdLife Australia supporters.*

## Hot Hot Hot!

A heatwave is not the ideal time to go out camping or bird watching, and unfortunately that's exactly what we got over the Christmas and New Year's period! Three small groups of intrepid volunteers still headed out to the woodlands. Victoria Cartledge, Andy Farrant, Stewart Ford, Cheryl Gole, Martin Gole, Bruce Greatwich, Jaime Hall, Nigel Jackett, Vicki Laurie, Rob Mather and Sue Mather all felt the heat. Thanks, people!

Although the high temperatures reduced bird activity, a great time was had by all and some very important information was gathered, for example the records of large numbers of Purple-crowned Lorikeets breeding in eucalypts near Peak Charles.

Amazingly, shortly into the New Year when project coordinator Liz Fox and volunteer Sarah Hedges headed out to the woodlands, it wasn't the heat they had to worry about but the rain! Cyclone Peta off the north-west coast was sending rain down through the centre of WA and it turned many of the dirt tracks to mud.

We are currently in need of volunteers for the Easter and winter surveys which are being held from March 29 - April 2 and June 15 - 21 (although dates are negotiable). Please contact Liz Fox if you'd like to be involved and see the GWW for yourself.

## Summer Trip Report

In early January five of us set out from Perth to survey the section of the trans-Australia rail access road (the trans-line) that passes through the Great Western Woodlands east of Kalgoorlie. We were looking forward to getting away from the madness of Perth during the festive season and catching up with a few birds we don't normally get to see in our day jobs.

With Navara and Land Rover fully loaded early in the morning, we made good time to Kalgoorlie and reached the first of the designated birding sites along the trans-line early in the afternoon. We had accounted for everything - except the weather. As it turns out, WA was in the grip of the Christmas and New Year heat wave and we had little respite



Plenty of time for a round of Woodlands cricket in between bird surveys.  
Photo: Stewart Ford

out east, with the first few surveys at the designated sites along the trans-line being very subdued. Not that this diminished our enjoyment; it's always nice to catch up with White-cheeked and Brown-headed Honeyeaters and other fantastic birds of the woodlands.

We followed the recommendation outlined in the survey pack and completed 2ha surveys embedded within 500m surveys so that we could count all the birds outside of the 2ha area as well, which really added to the enjoyment. At our campsite that night we picked up Spotted Nightjar and Southern Boobook and a pre-dawn Australian Owlet-nightjar rounded out the trio of night birds we were expecting. The Night Parrot remained elusive that night (and all subsequent ones!).

The following day was much the same, with sweltering heat and quiet birding along the remaining designated sites of the trans-line. The highlight was really the remoteness and getting to bird in some of the best woodland on the continent. The bird of the day competition (and coveted 'king camp chair' prize) were not easy to judge that day!

After a quick jaunt to the Nullarbor we returned to the woodlands and overnights at Lake Cronin, which put on a great show of 35 species in the cool hours around sunrise - before the heat kicked in again.

Overall we had a great time and 'doing our bit' as volunteers has never been more enjoyable!

Stewart Ford, Nigel Jackett, Bruce Greatwich, Victoria Cartledge and Jaime Hall

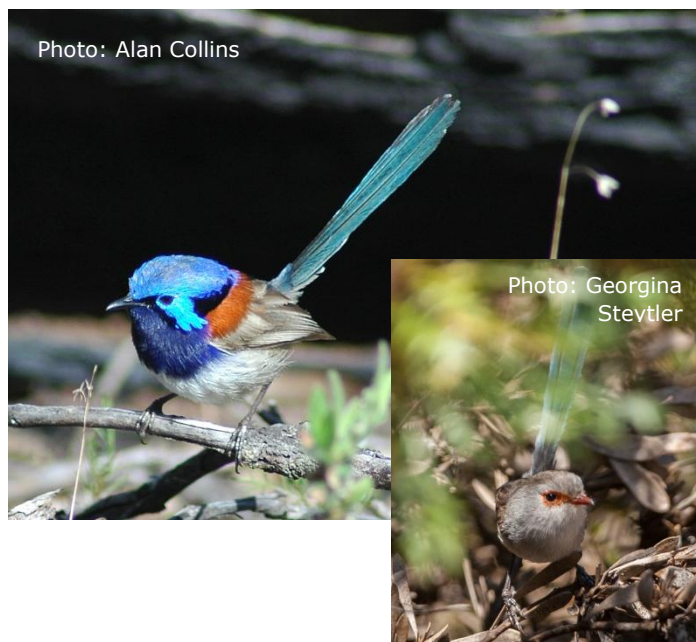
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# Species in Focus

## BLUE-BREASTED FAIRY-WREN



The Blue-breasted Fairy-wren looks very similar to the Variegated Fairy-wren except for the blue sheen on the breast (although the breast can still look black in the shade). Likewise the females look similar, although the eyering and lores in the Blue-breasted aren't quite as dark as in the Variegated.

The Blue-breasted Fairy-wren occurs predominantly across the WA wheatbelt. Clearing for farming has led to a reduction of at least 60% in their distribution, however because the species has such a large range (from Geraldton across to Adelaide), the population trend appears to be stable. Within the GWW it occurs in all but the north-east corner, in any suitable areas of shrubland and heathland.

Like other fairy-wrens, they live in small groups of 2-5 individuals, consisting of one breeding female, her consort and up to three helpers (usually adult male offspring), which maintain permanent territories. They are a cooperative breeding species, meaning that birds in addition to the breeding pair help to raise the chicks. They are subject to nest parasitism by Horsfield's Bronze-cuckoos.

Their diet consists of insects that are foraged for mostly on the ground. The males are much shyer than the females and while you will often get good views of the females jumping around in the bushes, the males are usually only glimpsed briefly as they skulk around in the undergrowth.

Want to sign up to receive this quarterly newsletter?  
Please send your email or home address to Liz:  
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0427 947 009 or 9287 2716.

# Our Fabulous Volunteers

So many wonderful people have been offering help for the Great Western Woodlands project and enabling us to undertake such an ambitious project. I would like to sincerely thank you all, and encourage others to get involved to help look after our amazing Woodlands.

So far we have had 52 people participate in the field surveys, conducting more than 1,000 bird surveys. We thank Logan Anderson, Judy Barfett, John Blyth, Judy Blyth, Russell Cannings, Victoria Cartledge, Roger Charles, Sue Charles, Judy Cullam, Tony Docherty, Andre Du Plessis, Judy Du Plessis, Andy Farrant, Stewart Ford, David Free, Pam Free, Cheryl Gole, Martin Gole, Bruce Greatwich, Ken Harris, Vivien Harris, Judith Harvey, Sarah Hedges, Andrew Hobbs, Jill Hobbs, Nigel Jackett, Virginia Jealous, Rhys Jones, Victoria Laurie, Karen Majer, Barbara Manson, Rob Mather, Sue Mather, Cheryl McCallum, Roger McCallum, Saul Montgomery, Simon Montgomery, Alex Morrison, June Morrison, Clive Napier, Wendy Napier, Alyson Paull, Ed Paull, Thora Ramsey, Martin Reeve, Chris Reidy, Dianne Reidy, Barrie Smith, Lorraine Todd, Joe van Vlijmen, Alan Warburton, Cheryl Warburton, Jan Waterman, Ron Waterman, Christine Wilder, and Boyd Wykes.

In the office, Jean Woodings, Darryl James and Veronika Gruenwald-Schwark have assisted with databasing, communications and data entry. Grant Boxer drafted the large topographic maps used by the field teams. Community education at schools in Kalgoorlie was carried out by Rod Smith, Brice Wells, Georgina Steytler and Joyce Hegney from BirdLife WA's Community Education Committee. Other community groups that have provided assistance include the Kalgoorlie-Boulder Urban Landcare Group, Goldfields Naturalists, Malleefowl Preservation Group, and BirdLife Esperance.

The project has a technical advisory group consisting of scientific advisors from across Australia who regularly give up their time to provide their expertise on the project. Thanks to Alan Burbidge, Mike Craig, Cheryl Gole (Chair), Carl Gosper, James Fitzsimons, Nick Nicholls, James O'Connor and Dave Watson.

I would also like to thank the following people for their advice and assistance on the project so far: Ramon Andinach, Mike Clarke, Ross Cunningham, David Gleeson, Greg Harewood, Janette Kavanagh, Amanda Keesing, Kim O'Reilly, Susanne Prober, Harry Recher, Angela Sanders, Zoe Scott, Judit Szabo, and Leslie Westerlund.





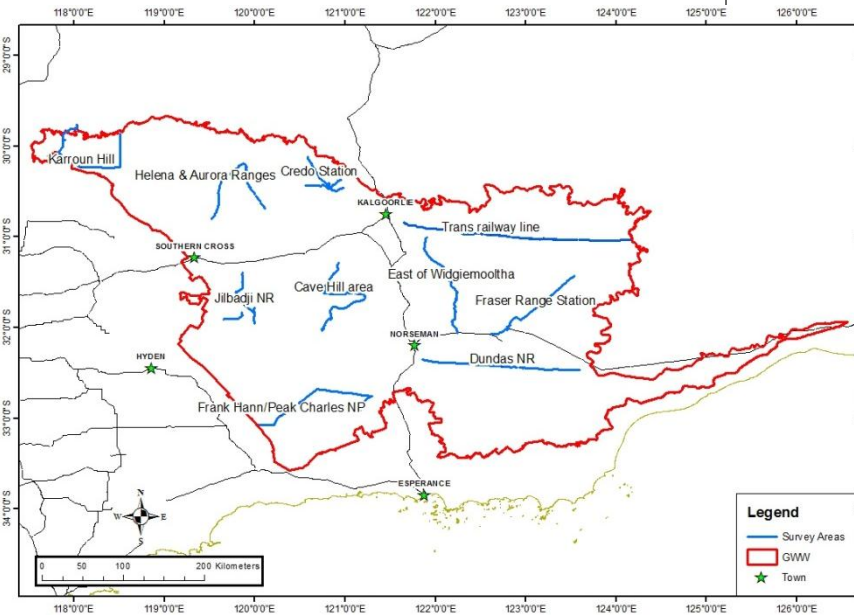
Photo: Stewart Ford

# Where Are We Going?

The Great Western Woodlands is a 16 million hectare region covering much of the Goldfields region. This makes it over twice the size of Tasmania. Now imagine trying to gather bird data from such a large and remote region! It would simply not be possible without the generosity of large numbers of volunteers who are willing to give up their time to head out, see some amazing parts of the WA outback and conduct bird surveys.

But where should they go? There are two main long-term monitoring questions we want to answer: 1) what is the distribution of species within the GWW, and 2) are species populations increasing, decreasing, or stable in the GWW?

To answer these questions we need to cover as much ground in the GWW as we can, but also visit the same locations a number of times so we can detect if species are changing in number. To cover both of these criteria, we have selected 10 locations across the GWW that we are asking volunteers to visit each season.



The blue lines on the map show the route that is traversed in each survey area, typically along a well maintained dirt road. However, we are also interested in any bird records from within the GWW, recorded at any time as this all adds to our knowledge of where the birds are.

**Karroun Hill:** The largest and probably least well known nature reserve in south west WA. The route travels around the edge of the reserve and along a section of the State Barrier Fence (previously the Rabbit Proof Fence) through some beautiful eucalypt woodland and diverse shrubland. Malleefowl are often seen in this area and it is on the edge of range for many bird species.

**Helena & Aurora Ranges:** This area is one of the few intact Banded Ironstone Formations remaining in the region, containing a variety of endemic and diverse animals and plants. There are currently proposals to begin mining in this area so get out and see this beautiful place while you still can.

**Credo Station:** The station is a proposed conservation reserve. It has a permanent DEC officer in residence, a research station is currently being built, and accommodation in dongers or in the shearing shed is available. The house dam brings in large numbers of bush and water birds, as does neighbouring Rowles Lagoon when it contains water.

**Trans Railway Line:** Following the dirt road alongside the Trans-Australia Railway from Kalgoorlie to Kitchener. You can wave at the trains and see the birds in this little visited area. Being close to the Great Victoria Desert and Nullarbor Plain results in slightly different vegetation to the rest of the GWW, plus a few more arid zone birds.

**Jilbadji Nature Reserve:** This reserve lies between the Great Eastern Hwy and the Holland track which is popular with 4WD tourists. The nearby Lake Cronin is a haven for birds and even has its own endemic snake.

**Cave Hill Area:** A popular tourist spot encompassing McDermid Rock, Cave Hill and Victoria Rock. Each area has designated camping areas with toilets, barbecues and picnic tables, and are suitable for larger groups. There are impressive rock formations, dams created for the railways, and delightful eucalypt woodland, much of which has regrown after being cut for timber in the 1920s.

**East of Widgiemooltha:** A little visited area to the east of Lake Cowan. This route travels through active pastoral stations (permission required) between Eyre Highway and the Trans-Australia Railway.

**Fraser Range Station:** Yet another little visited area, with previous GWW volunteers being the first to conduct any bird surveys within a 50km radius. The station runs a caravan park with full facilities available.

**Frank Hann/Peak Charles National Parks:** The south west corner of the GWW contains much more shrubland than woodland, although the pockets of salmon gum woodland here are often teeming with birds. The shrublands attract large numbers of honeyeaters, as well as species such as Southern Scrub-robin, Shy Heathwren and Rufous Fieldwren.

**Dundas Nature Reserve:** A little known track traverses through Dundas Nature Reserve along the route of the old telegraph line from Norseman to Balladonia, built in the late 1800s. Much of this area is regenerating after several large fires in the 2000s.

It's a sad fact that you sometimes come across dead birds. However, these sightings can still tell us useful information about where birds occur, particularly when they are of species not often seen during surveys. Incidental records of dead birds can be made on an Atlas Record Form.



Photo: Cheryl Gole

## What's On?

### UPCOMING SURVEYS AND EVENTS

#### GWW EASTER SURVEY

March 29 – April 2 2013

Once Autumn arrives and the temperatures cool down a bit the birds should be out in full force. There are still places available for this upcoming survey so put your name down now.

#### GWW WINTER SURVEY

15 – 21 June 2013

If the heat isn't your thing then winter is a great time to visit the GWW. The weather is cooler, you can enjoy a hot chocolate around the campfire, and the rain has washed the dust off the eucalypt leaves. Just remember to pack your beanie for the mornings!

#### FUTURE SURVEY DATES

If you would like to organise a future trip to the GWW, all survey dates to the end of 2014 are shown below. Please remember that all dates are flexible and surveys at any time of year are appreciated.

**Spring 2013:** September 27 – October 3

**Summer 2013/2014:** December 28 – January 3

**Autumn 2014:** April 18 – 24

**Winter 2014:** July 12 – 18

**Spring 2014:** September 27 – October 3



Photo: Nigel Jackett

## Opportunity for an Organised and Enthusiastic Volunteer

The Great Western Woodlands project could not happen without the amazing support of the volunteers who head out to the Woodlands and tell us all about what they find.

The project is also indebted to our current office volunteers Jean Woodings and Darryl James, but we are looking for another organised and outgoing person with great communication skills who can assist with keeping in contact with our fantastic field volunteers, make new contacts and find new volunteers, and make sure everyone is clear and confident in what they need to do on the field trips. You will also need to have general skills, or be willing to learn, in relation to OH&S, map reading, and remote travel.

You must be able to work without supervision and demonstrate self-motivation and enthusiasm. This position will require a commitment of approximately one day per week (hours flexible), with all costs covered.

Support for all activities will be provided by the project coordinator. Basic experience with Microsoft Word and Excel would be useful and you could work either from home or the BirdLife office. Please contact Liz Fox for more information.

It's not just the birds that are fascinating out in the woodlands – this perfectly round hole with the odd internal structure like the neck of a jar is made by a species of ant.

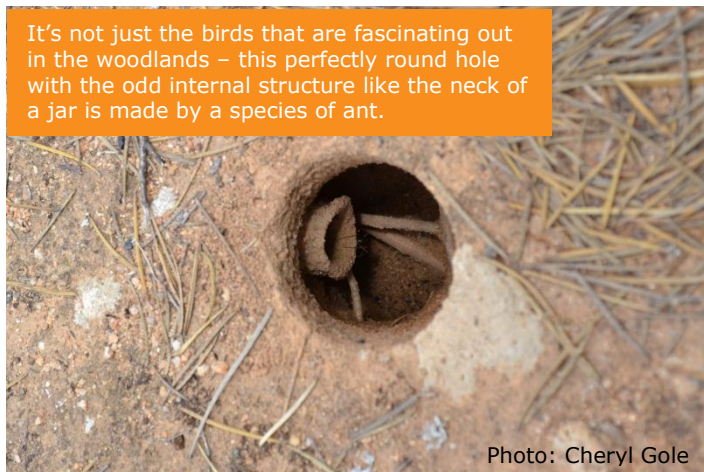


Photo: Cheryl Gole



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Photo: Martin Gole