

Woodlands on the Wing

Issue 5 Winter 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.

The Winter Chill

Despite the frosty and foggy mornings, all groups undertaking the winter surveys in the Woodlands reported conducting interesting surveys with reasonable numbers of species at all locations.

Even though there wasn't much in flower, quite a few different honeyeater species were recorded. Water in the salt lakes resulted in sightings of Black Swan, Grey Teal, Shelduck, Banded Stilt and Red-kneed Dotterel which are always great to see in the arid zone. The high water level did cause some problems accessing the Dundas Nature Reserve though, with Lake Dundas found to be gently lapping over the edges of the sole track into the reserve from the western side. Not to be discouraged, the group consisting of Sue Abbotts, Kerry Cowie and Christine Wilder headed to Balladonia and entered Dundas Nature Reserve via the eastern end. Their sightings of Gilbert's Whistler and Western Rosella in this region are some of the eastern-most sightings that we have of these species. Aside from the birds, a patch of Sturt's Desert Pea in flower near Fraser Range station also caused delight for the group surveying this area.

Many of the eucalypts across the GWW were seen to be heavy with buds, so fingers crossed there will be lots of flowering during the spring surveys!



Sturt's Desert Pea
Photo: Joe Porter



Old telegraph track through
Dundas Nature Reserve
Photo: Christine Wilder

GWW Adventure

Trip Report by Barbara Manson

On a cold cloudy morning five hardy souls (Dianne & Chris Reidy, Henny & Martin Knight, and Barbara Manson) set off from Southern Cross north through Koolyanobbing along a dirt track towards the Helena & Aurora Ranges. Along the way we surveyed many sites. The area was predominantly mallee. We had 4-6 species at most sites and considering the cold weather this was a reasonable result.

By mid-afternoon a light drizzle had set in so the vote was to find a suitable campsite for the night. We hadn't reached the ranges, however a suitable site was found with the added bonus of a deserted miners hut. It wasn't long before smoke was rising from the chimney as we enjoyed a glass of wine and discussed the plan for the next day.

We surveyed around the southern end of the ranges however the track became too boggy for us to continue so we abandoned any thoughts of proceeding further north. We ventured along the eastern side of the range to an elevated position with extensive views to the east.

As we were unable to continue further north we agreed to return to Southern Cross have a night at Karalee Rocks Dam, then try the track south to Jilbadji Nature Reserve. The entrance to the track was a little elusive due to recent verge works however our trusty leaders Dianne & Chris found the way and we headed south along a very good track.

We set up base camp and went out each day to do the surveys. The soil is very sandy in this area so we were not troubled with boggy tracks. We continued our travels south surveying along the way and eventually joining up with the Marvel Loch Road.

Our final lunch at Lake Cronin, although nearly dry, there were many birds to keep up entertained, a great finish to our week of adventure.

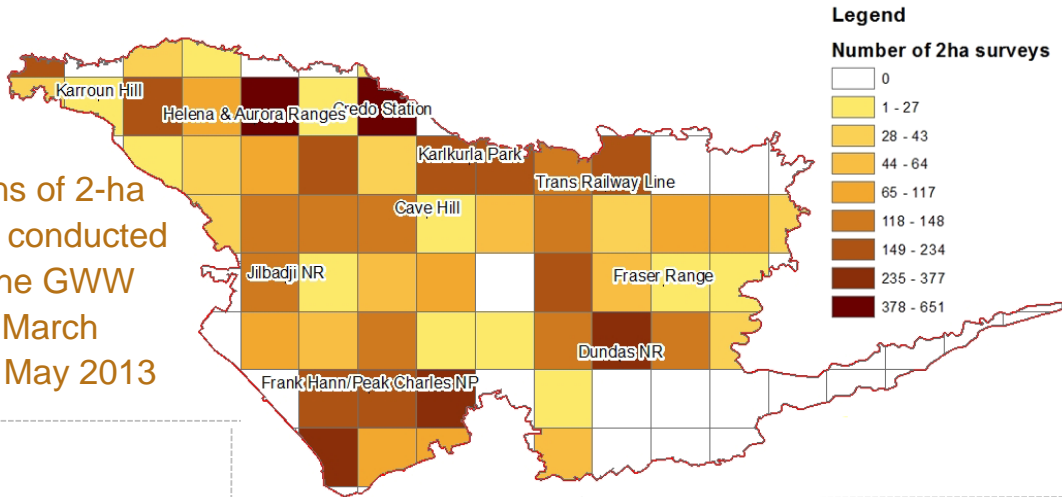
birds are in our nature

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Results to Date

Locations of 2-ha surveys conducted during the GWW project, March 2012 to May 2013



165



Bird species recorded since the GWW project started

Number of bird surveys conducted to date

1,304



84

Number of volunteers that have taken part in the project

The most commonly recorded species in the GWW is the

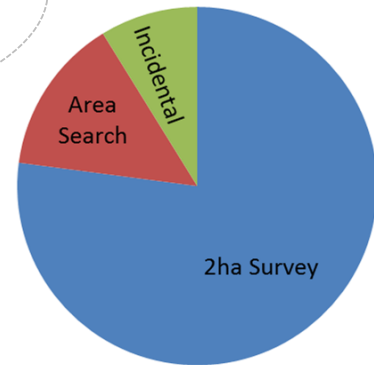
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40

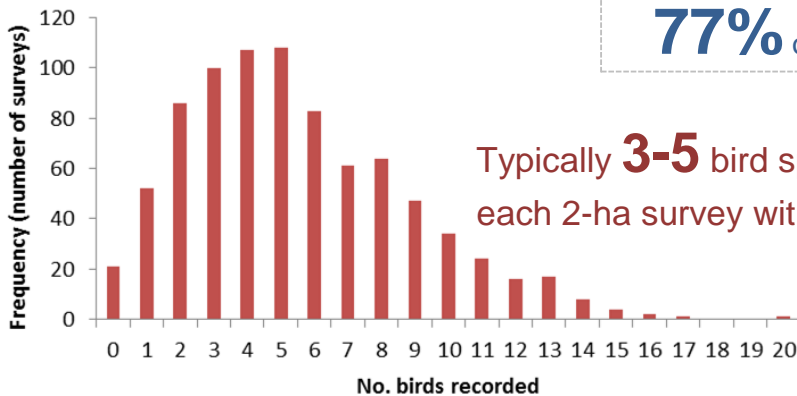


Average number of Atlas forms submitted per survey group



2-hectares surveys, which will be vital for population trend analysis, account for

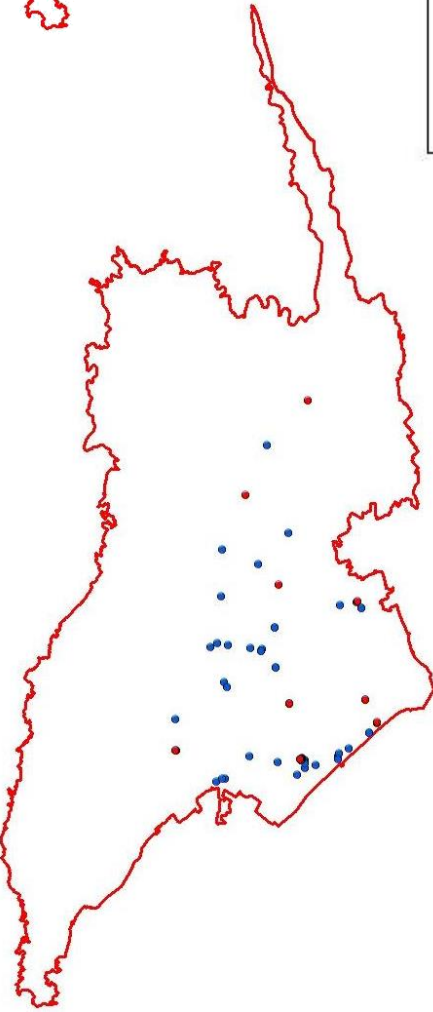
77% of surveys



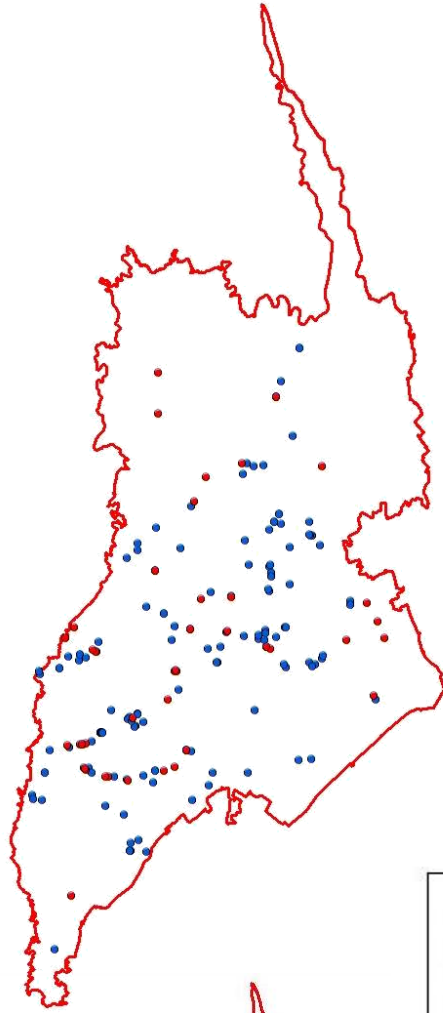
Typically **3-5** bird species are recorded in each 2-ha survey within the GWW

Example species distribution maps showing records before and after 2012

Western Rosella



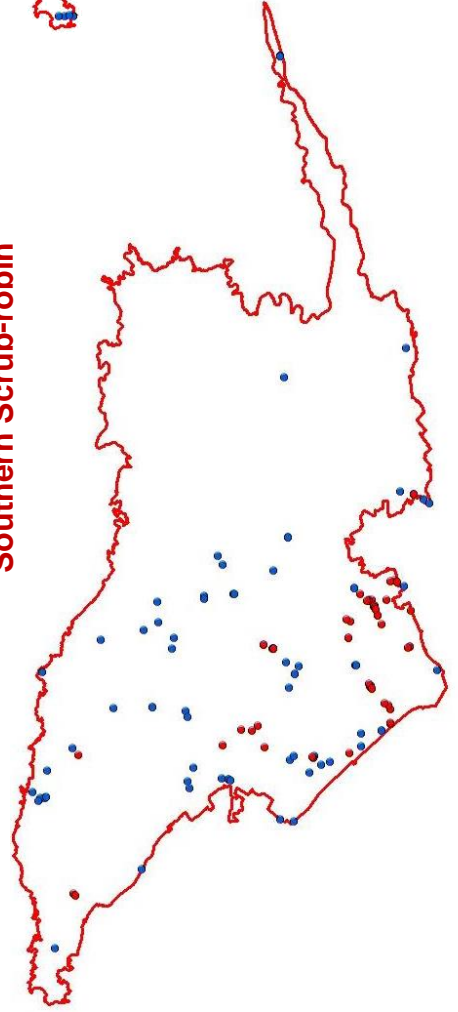
Gilbert's Whistler



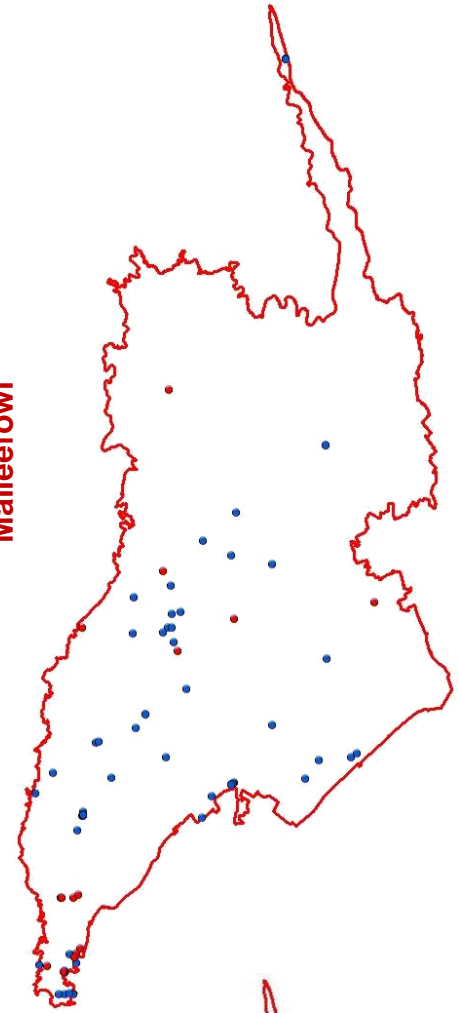
After 2012

Before 2012

Southern Scrub-robin



Malleefowl



Species in Focus

SHY HEATHWREN



Chris Tzaros

The Shy Heathwren occurs across Southern Australia in mallee and areas of dense low cover. With their streaked breast and white eyebrow they are occasionally mistaken for the western subspecies of the White-browed Scrubwren, but their bright chestnut rump, cocked tail and musical song are distinctive.

As their name suggests they are a secretive species that is often difficult to spot as they hide in dense vegetation close to the ground. They feed on the ground, hunting invertebrates including grasshoppers, beetles, caterpillars, moths and ants.

Shy Heathwren have declined in the wheatbelt region of WA as a result of vegetation clearing and degradation, and are listed as Priority 4 by the Department of Parks and Wildlife, meaning that it is a species in need of monitoring. The Shy Heathwren is one of the species we are focussing on in the GWW project in order to identify if their population is stable in the region and what habitat they rely on so that we can ensure their continued survival.

They breed in late winter to early summer, building a well-concealed dome-shaped nest close to the ground.

Fraser Range Station

Trip Report by Ray Flanagan

Able led by Liz Fox, five of us (Ed Paull, Alyson Paull, Joe Porter, Stella Stewart-Wynne and Ray Flanagan) headed out to survey the Fraser Range Station area. A total of 62 species were recorded – a great achievement considering it was winter.

Staying at Coolgardie for the first night meant we arrived at Fraser Range Station about lunchtime on Sunday. Along the way we stopped for morning tea north of Norseman and new birder Joe Porter was captivated by his first sighting of a Red-capped Robin sitting in the winter sunshine. Once at Fraser Range we quickly headed out to do some afternoon birding, covering 3 of the sites nearby. There were good sightings of Rufous Treecreepers and Yellow-plumed Honeyeater in the woodlands, while a flock of Purple-crowned Lorikeets flew past too fast to get a good look.

On Monday we headed east for woodland sites. We were fortunate to see three Gilbert's Whistlers, a pair calling back

and forth only 2 metres away was a real treat. White-browed Babblers, Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters and numerous Redthroats were also in evidence.

Tuesday was a long day heading north-east about 90 km along a station track, getting back late after a very full day. A pair of Mulga Parrots sat in a low tree alongside the track while we gazed in wonder at their brilliant paintbrush colours. Most sites were open woodland, with only a small amount of flowering. Despite this, honeyeaters were around and we were delighted to see a total of 8 different species during the surveys, including brown-headed, white-fronted, white-eared, and yellow-plumed. We stopped to admire a large patch of Sturt's Desert Pea in flower alongside the track in a red dirt and Spinifex habitat. We also saw a Dingo, Red and Grey Kangaroos, Euros, Wedge-tailed Eagles and Emus in the waning light and beautiful red wallabies on a rocky outcrop.



Fraser Range Station
Photo: Ray Flanagan

Wednesday, our last full day at Fraser Range Station, we headed west. Our first stop was a large salt lake – where with the scope we sighted Red-kneed Dotterels and Red-capped Plovers, along with Grey Teals, Australian Shelducks, and Black Swans. We then stopped at other woodland sites and a Mallee area with a granite quarry where we were delighted to see Blue-breasted Fairy-wrens. An extended family with one male in full colour in a party of about eight.

On Thursday, it was time to head homeward towards Hyden and Wave Rock for the night, stopping briefly along the way to scope out some waterbirds, adding Pink-eared Ducks and Banded Stilts to our list. A lunch stop at Disappointment Rock gave us a great view of a Purple-gaped Honeyeater. As we crossed over the Vermin Proof Fence Liz's voice came over the two way "say farewell to the Great Western Woodlands".

The Great Western Woodlands are truly a wondrous place and we can highly recommend a trip to Fraser Range Station.



Chestnut Quail-thrush
Photo: Scott Corbett



Pied Butcherbird
Photo: Alex Morrison

What's On?

UPCOMING SURVEYS AND EVENTS

GWW SPRING SURVEYS

27 Sept–3 Oct or 3–9 Oct 2013

The weather is warming, birds are breeding and the Salmon Gums may be in flower. All excellent reasons to be out in the Woodlands!

Survey groups will be heading out to all the usual locations, including Helena and Aurora Range, Fraser Range Station, Credo Station, Cave Hill, Peak Charles, Trans Railway Line and Dundas Nature Reserve.

There are still places available in all survey groups so contact Liz now for more details.

GWW SUMMER SURVEYS

January 2014

Due to the high temperatures and potential for high fire risk days, we are not setting a survey date for the upcoming summer surveys in the GWW. We would prefer surveys to be conducted in January, but any time between December and February is possible.

These summer surveys provide extremely useful information on what the birds are doing during these difficult periods of low food and water availability, but it can be challenging to find volunteers willing to take part in these surveys. If you are interested in being involved, please contact Liz for further details.

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: 27 September–3 October

Summer 2013/14: January

Autumn 2014: 18–24 April

Winter 2014: 12–18 July

Spring 2014: 27 September–3 October

Want to sign up to receive this quarterly newsletter?
Please send your email or home address to Liz:
liz.fox@birdlife.org.au
0427 947 009 or (08) 9287 2716.

Part-time Position Available

An exciting opportunity exists to work with BirdLife Australia on the Great Western Woodlands project. An energetic and outgoing Project Officer is being sought to recruit, train, coordinate and retain volunteers taking part in the Great Western Woodlands project. Previous experience working and communicating with volunteers is essential, and bird-watching skills and networks would be beneficial to the position.

The position is part-time (0.6 FTE) and preferably based at the Floreat office (although this may be negotiable for the right applicant).

Contact Liz Fox for more details and a copy of the Position Description; liz.fox@birdlife.org.au or 0427 947 009.

Applications, to include a cover letter, CV and response to selection criteria, are due **2nd September 2013**.



Photo: Andre Du Plessis



LIZ FOX
**Great Western Woodlands
Project Coordinator**

E liz.fox@birdlife.org.au

M 0427 947 009

T (08) 9287 2716

W www.birdlife.org.au/projects/great-western-woodlands

Photo: Martin Gole