

Woodlands on the Wing

Issue 9 Winter 2014

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 supporters from BirdLife Australia.

Winter surveys



Striated Pardalote
Photo: Tim Sargent

Four areas were surveyed this winter. They were Fraser Range, Credo Station, Frank Hann/Peak Charles and Cave Hill. This was the first time that Cave Hill and Frank Hann/Peak Charles had been surveyed in winter. Karlkurla Bush Park, in Kalgoorlie was also

surveyed on 23 August.

The vegetation was looking good following the high summer and autumn rains. This was despite of a relatively low winter rainfall for many areas in the Great Western Woodlands

The first **Crested Shrike-tit** for the GWW Project was sighted by Ray Flanagan at Fraser Range Station during a survey in June. Another great sighting at Fraser Range was a **Ground Cuckoo Shrike**. An active **Malleefowl** mound was found while surveying Frank Hann/Peak Charles.

A Remote Survey was conducted in early August, visiting 15' blocks that had none to few (less than five) bird surveys in the south east corner of the Great Western Woodlands. John Baas, Christine Allbeury, Brenda Newbey, Robert Morales and Mark Binns set out in three vehicles and started their remote survey on Toolina Cove Track, east of Balladonia, and then continued west over a period of seven days to Balbinia about 100 km south of Balladonia Roadhouse. The weather was great, the tracks dry (sometimes a bit overgrown) and plenty of good birds were seen. These surveys have significantly helped to increase our knowledge of the species present in the south east GWW.

Birds at Credo in July Trip Report by Tim Sargent

Digby Knapp, Rory Swiderski and I met in Mundaring early Saturday morning, and after a few quick breaks and fuel stops, we arrived at Credo Station before 5pm where we met Graeme & Aina Hargans who had already set up camp in a caravan. The gravel road out to the station was in top condition having recently been graded and was honestly better than some parts of the bitumen road we had travelled on in our trip up.

Our group consisted of two 4WD utes and an AWD sedan. All vehicles performed well over the roads and the rougher 4WD station tracks, which had several washouts and required attentive driving, as we quickly found out, especially when driving at night. The station was very well set up with hot showers, a proper kitchen, rainwater, dongas and fire pits, so we could hardly call it camping.

Gathering of firewood was also permitted thus became part of our afternoon surveys; the quest for good wood became an adventure in itself. That night as we relaxed around a good fire, we discussed plans for the next day before retiring to bed.

A large amount of our survey work was carried out by listening instead of seeing, and with the help of an app (Michael Morcombe Birds of Australia) to confirm a call, it was a great success and resulted in enhanced identification skills.



Early morning start
Photo: Tim Sargent
© Timothy Sargent

Day 1 saw us travel south of the station where an **Australian Hobby** and a female **Mulga Parrot** were sighted kicking the trip off to a good start. The road out is part of the Golden Quest Discovery Trail and a site of interest along the way was the Kunanalling Pub where we stopped in for a look (and a drink).

Whilst sitting around the fire the second night, we heard a **Spotted Nightjar** calling in the distance. We decided to go see if we could locate it, but after an hour walking around we called it quits. Driving back to camp on dusk the following nights however, allowed several individual sightings of this species as they preyed on insects along the road.



Rowles Lagoon
Photo: Tim Sargent

Rowles Lagoon was surveyed later in the week with **Musk Duck, Pink-eared Duck, Australian Shelduck, Hoary-headed Grebe** being the more interesting species of waterbirds. A tree was eventually climbed to get a clear view of the lake, as surrounding vegetation prevented any clear views to be had. Several birds were observed in the surrounding vegetation namely, **Varied Sittella, Crested Bellbird, Red-capped Robin, Grey Shrike-thrush, Singing Honeyeater** and an inquisitive group of **Jacky Winters** which allowed close approach and didn't mind posing for the camera.

Marking the northern-most survey site is Ularring Rock, sighted in 1875 by Ernest Giles and his exploration party. **Red-capped Robin, Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater, Inland Thornbill, Chestnut-rumped Thornbill, Southern Whiteface, Redthroat, Zebra Finch, Splendid-fairy Wren** and **Grey Shrike-thrush** were some of the more interesting species here. Seeing as a large degree of travel time was required, we decided to make this a day trip and brought lunch along. A little after lunch a storm rolled in with some spectacular cloud formations overhead, and although it did rain, it passed in less than an hour. During this time, we took the chance to explore the rocks and in the process found two species of gecko – Bynoe's Gecko and Tree Dтеля.

The weather was consistently cold throughout the day, and we all found ourselves wearing two jumpers for the entire day. Although thunderclouds loomed on the horizon on several occasions, we eventually got used to them only bringing rain for 10 minutes or so before passing overhead. Any rain mainly dampened the gravel roads, which kept the dust down whilst travelling in convoy.

Eremophila were very common across all survey sites, with many in flower. Varying types of mistletoe were also sighted several times. Sandalwood and Quandong were also found across the area. One site we surveyed was the only one that contained *Grevillea* and this area was abundant with several honeyeater species, including our first sighting of **Brown-headed Honeyeater**.



The Team
Photo: Tim Sargent

This brought our total observed honeyeater species up to nine. **White-fronted Honeyeater** and **Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater** were two of the more pleasant honeyeater species.

Birds of Prey sightings throughout the trip included **Brown Falcon, Australian Hobby, Collared Sparrowhawk, Wedge-tailed Eagle** and **Spotted Harrier**.

A common occurrence, but by no means easy to track, were groups of **White-winged Fairy-wrens**. Glimpses of the brightly coloured male were had several times.

Although a quick glimpse of a **Quail-thrush** was had early on in the trip, it proved to be elusive and was not seen again, so no tick was had due to unconfirmed I.D.

Community Education Committee in the GWW

By Rod Smith, Joyce Hegney and Brice Wells

During the last three days of May, our team visited three primary schools: Boulder, Coolgardie and East Kalgoorlie. Presentations were on the identification of common local birds and the importance of the Great Western Woodlands. Class sizes were generally around 20 children with two to four teachers participating. A positive response from all involved leaves the door open for future involvement.

We then presented our information to the Goldfields Naturalists' Club as guests at their monthly meeting, focusing on an ID session of bird species that might be encountered in parts of the GWW beyond the local Kalgoorlie region. This was followed the next day by a walk at Karlkurla Park, including the surveying of three 2ha sites, another regular survey area for the GWW Project. The provision of binoculars for all that attended the walk greatly enhanced the experience for everyone.

Introducing Cave Hill and Jilbadji

Report by Allan and Sandy Rose

After attending the 2014 Birdlife WA Easter campout at Credo Station, Sandy and I decided to continue with bird surveys in the Cave Hill and Jilbadji Nature Reserve area of the Great Western Woodlands.

Cave Hill

Easter Monday saw Sandy and I, and most of the people at the Credo campout head south. Cave Hill was our destination along with Sue and Robert Mather and Peter White. A **Southern Boobook** road kill was seen on the road to Burra Rock where two **Purple-gaped Honeyeaters** were seen. We took the old woodline track (a narrow single track) from Burra Rock to Cave Hill stopping a couple of times to see some of the common woodland birds like **Redthroat**, **White-eared Honeyeater** and **Weebills**.



Woodline from Burra Rock to Cave Hill
Photo: Allan and Sandy Rose

We arrived at the western campsite at Cave Hill and after a cuppa we went for a short walk amongst the woodland. **Purple-gaped Honeyeaters** were common as were **Red Wattlebirds**, **Inland** and **Chestnut-rumped Thornbills**, **Redthroats** and **Australian Ringnecks**. A night walk around the campsite and nearby roads revealed no nocturnal birds but an **Australian Owlet-nightjar** had been heard during the day.

Cave Hill is a large rock 1km wide and 1.5km long with 5 dams constructed during the woodline days. The area had received rain early in the year as the dams were about half full and some eucalypts in flower.

Sue produced a map of the Cave Hill bird survey sites and was certain that there was a site not far from our campsite. So Robert, Peter, Sandy and I along with Sue clutching a GPS and leading the way, set off from camp convinced it was just around the corner. Four kilometers later we arrived at the bird survey site at the eastern campsite.

Eight species of birds were seen during the 20 minute survey including four species of honeyeaters: **White-fronted**, **White-eared**, **Purple-gaped** and **Spiny-cheeked**. Birding took a backstage on the return walk with yachting trips taking over the conversations.

A Mulga Snake was seen sunning itself outside a small ground hole near the western campsite.

After two nights camping at Cave Hill we all headed off to the west, sharing half of the 8 bird survey sites along this road. Our first site was 1.8km west of Cave Hill amongst old vegetation. **Weebills**, **Yellow-plumed Honeyeaters**, **White-fronted Honeyeaters** and **White-browed Babbler** were common here and at other Cave Hill sites. Near the end of the 20 minute survey we came out onto the road, looked back towards our vehicle, and to our surprise we saw a **Malleefowl** on the edge of the road. Sue, Robert and Peter surveyed the western four survey sites along the Cave Hill road but few birds were seen, probably due to the vegetation being burnt about 4-6 years ago.

We all met at McDermid Rock for lunch where **Purple-gaped Honeyeaters** were common around the campsite allowing close views of their purple gapes. A small campsite at the base of the rock would be good for birding.

Jilbadji

The Hyden/Norseman Road west of McDermid Rock is an excellent wide hard gravel road (probably due to mines near Mount Day) and saw us travel at a comfortable 80 kph. We turned off this road and headed for Lake Cronin Nature Reserve while Sue, Robert and Peter headed for Cheyne Beach for the Birdlife WA campout.

Birds recorded at the two survey sites at Lake Cronin included 9 **Striated Pardalotes** and a couple of **Blue-breasted Fairy-wrens**. Lake Cronin is a small lake and was dry, and only fills occasionally. It's hard to believe that a small community was established in the 1920's, trying to farm the area due to an unusual rain filling the lake. The area has reverted back to mallee and woodland with no sign of any farming. We did not locate the Lake Cronin Snake that is found here that also occurs on Peak Eleanor in Peak Charles National Park.

We headed north along the Marvel Loch-Forrestania Road, a good dirt road, into Jilbadji Nature Reserve hoping to survey all the 26 bird survey sites. This area missed out on the January/February good rains that Credo Station received resulting in very few plants flowering and low numbers of bird species.



Gilbert's Whistler
Photo: Chris Tzaros

One exception was at the Mount Holland and Forrestania Road crossroads, a popular campsite for Holland Track users. Here we saw a **Rufous Treecreeper**, a male **Western Rosella**, 10 **Brown-headed Honeyeaters** and a male **Gilbert's Whistler**.

Most of the Jilbadji bird survey sites are not on

the Forrestania Road but along single narrow tracks within the Jilbadji Nature Reserve. Large wildfires in the nature reserve, about 4 and 10 years ago, has seen the vegetation recover slowly resulting in few bird species. A **Western Yellow Robin** was a surprise sighting in a small, unburnt 3ha woodland area surrounded by burnt vegetation approximately 5 years old.

The sun was setting so we set up camp at Jilbadji site 9 amongst a large unburnt woodland area just off the Banker/Mount Day Road. During the afternoon grey clouds were building up and the weather forecast was for rain the next day. A **Southern Boobook** and **Australian Owlet-nightjar** were heard at night. Light rain fell over night so we rose early to do a 20 minute survey that revealed thirteen bird species, such as **Brown-headed Honeyeaters**, **Western Yellow Robins**, **Southern Scrub-robins** and **Crested Bellbird**, calling more frequently than at the other sites, probably due to the overnight light rain.

We surveyed two other bird survey sites on the way out of Jilbadji Nature Reserve turning off the Banker/Mount Day Road on to a more recent track following the survey sites route. Continual light rain started to fall and knowing what rain can do to tracks in this soil we decided not to do any more bird surveys and head for the Great Eastern Highway some 70km away.

Rain continued with puddles forming on the track in places and clayey areas became slippery. Four wheel drive was engaged in the woodland pockets where the track became slippery. Thankfully there were sections of sandplain making the vehicle track easy going as the water soaks into the soil. Great Eastern Highway was reached which had low fog type cloud covering it.

Due to the rain, we were unable to survey nine of the Jilbadji bird survey sites so we intend to revisit the area later in the year.

Participant Questionnaire

An online survey was sent to all participants in the GWW Project in July 2014. This was to get feedback on how we run the surveys and any issues participants are concerned about in the GWW.

Roger McCallum was the winner of the participant online survey.

We are also interested in anyone else's feedback on what research or conservation issues they would like addressed in the GWW.

Contact: gww@birdlife.org.au or

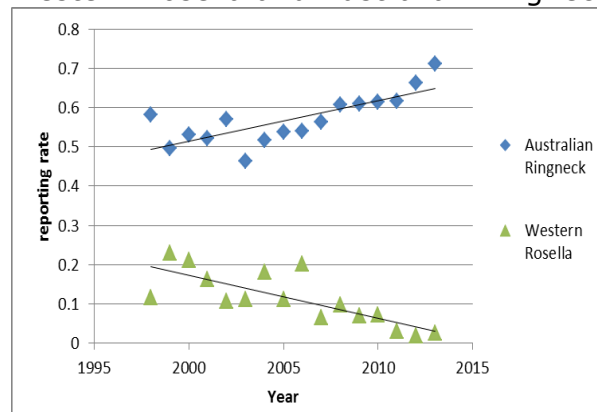
Liz Fox liz.fox@birdlife.org.au



A quiet, shy, bird, often transient, moving in response to availability of food resources.

The Western Rosella occurs throughout the south west of Western Australia, with the western subspecies occurring in the SW forests, and the eastern subspecies occurring in the eastern wheatbelt and Great Western Woodlands. There is concern that the species, overall, may be in decline. An analysis of Bird Atlas data shows a significant downward trend in the reporting rate for Western Rosella, in contrast to an increasing trend for the Australian Ringneck, a species that has benefitted from the presence of fruit orchards and spilt grain (see graph below). While this is only a preliminary analysis, it does highlight that the Western Rosella's continued presence in the south west of the state is not assured.

Trends in reporting rates for the Western Rosella and Australian Ringneck



In the Great Western Woodlands (GWW) the Western Rosella appears to occur in low numbers, with only 26 sightings over the past 3 years. It is most frequently sighted around granite outcrops and water bodies and it is possible that the decreasing rainfall in the South West has resulted in its apparent decline. Within the GWW, birds have recently been recorded around Karalee Dam, Lake Cronin, The Breakaways and in the woodland surrounding Peak Charles.

We would like to get a better idea of how many birds are in the GWW and where they occur so we can determine from data analysis whether they are stable in the region. If you see a Western Rosella in the GWW please let us know, either using the Bird Atlas forms or contact us with the date and GPS coordinates or a description of the location.

The GWW Committee



(Absent: Sue Abbotts, Stewart Ford, David Gilchrist, Alison Goundrey, Scott McGregor)

Sue Abbotts

Currently away. Keen birdwatcher, Member of Excursions Committee, strong supporter of GWW Project and GWW.

Alison Goundrey

Over 40 years experience in building family businesses centred around the wine industry in Australia, UK and France, with focus on marketing and promotional strategies. More recently as the operator of a regional art gallery. I have been an avid bird watcher for most of my life and now, having been touched by the magic of the GWW, I feel deeply about the importance of preserving and protecting it from fragmentation.

David Gilchrist

I see the GWW as a globally important place and one that needs all of us to protect it and nurture it.

Mark Henryon – Research Officer

I am a member of the Executive Committee for BirdLife WA. My childhood interest in birds became an active pastime when I worked in Denmark (Europe). I am a member of Birdlife Australia and the Danish Ornithological Society. I am looking forward to contributing my research skills to the GWW project. I work as a geneticist for the Danish pig industry and spend about five months of each year in Denmark.

Nola Kunnen

Birdlife WA member and WA Office volunteer. The Great Western Woodland is one of my favourite parts of Western Australia and I enjoy introducing the GWW to interstate and overseas visitors. Being a member of the GWW Committee is a way of supporting Birdlife's important work in the GWW now and into the future.

Maris Lauva – Survey Coordinator

I have helped with various birding projects over the years, mainly boots on ground carrying out surveys. I appreciate the value of good information and support when you're out in the field and in my role as Committee member & part of the GWW volunteer support group I will endeavour to provide that assistance.

Libby McGill

I have been a member of Birdlife (or its predecessors) overseas and in Australia since 1967! Currently my task on the GWW Committee is to enter all the GWW survey sites onto the Bird Atlas Birddata website as group survey sites so that birders can enter their sightings straight onto Birddata.

Stewart Ford – Research Officer

I'm a Research Officer on the GWW Committee and I'm particularly interested in data collection, management and analysis. I've had the good fortune of being able to go birding extensively in the GWW as a volunteer for a number of organisations, and I've really enjoyed taking part in the GWW.

Lou Martini

Although I have not previously been active in BirdLife Australia, I have been a member for a number of years and have always had a keen interest in birds and conservation. I currently work in the information industry and plan to draw on my experience and business networks to assist, as a member of the Fundraising sub-committee, to establish a sustainable funding stream for the GWW Project.

Scott McGregor

Currently away. Will assist with producing GWW newsletter.

Wayne Monks - Chair

I resided in the Eastern Goldfields for 20 years in mineral exploration then financial roles including 20 years with WMC Resources. In 2008/2010 I promoted a "Regional Park" concept, with Birds Australia, local councils, CVA and friends groups establishing ecological corridors with the planting of native vegetation for Carnaby's Black Cockatoos and other native birds. I am currently Treasurer and interim Country Liaison Officer of the Executive Committee BirdLife WA.

Erica Shedley – Research Officer

I live in the south-west and have been a keen birdwatcher for about 15 years, but my main interest in being on the GWW committee is to ensure the bird surveys and research effort are focused on understanding how birds respond to habitat disturbances. After completing my PhD in botany and ecology, I have worked for the Department of Parks and Wildlife in various roles in nature conservation management and research in fire ecology, threatened flora management, fauna habitat mapping and vegetation monitoring.

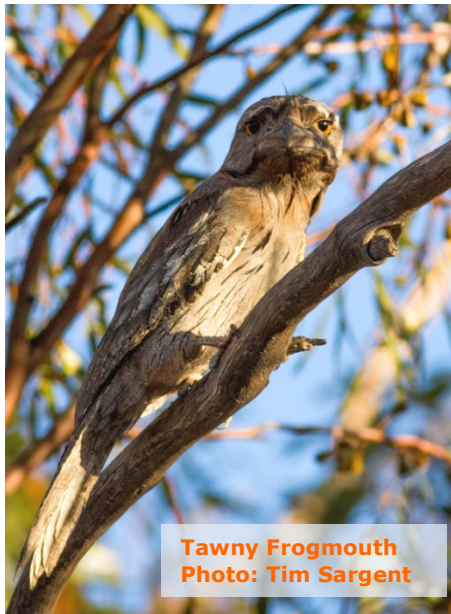
John Skillen - Secretary

I have been interested in birds since I was at Primary School. I was fortunate to be able to continue my interest in bird watching when I joined the Forests Department (later CALM and DEC) until the time of my retirement three years ago. Since my retirement I have joined Birdlife WA and am looking forward to helping with the Great Western Woodlands Project.

Tawny Frogmouths in the Winter 2014

Among the five GWW bird surveys conducted this winter three of the surveys came across Tawny Frogmouths. One pair was located in late June at Fraser Range, one at Credo in July and four pairs south of Eyre Highway during the remote survey in early August, a total of six sightings (and 11 birds).

Although the reporting rates appear relatively similar each year these are the first records during a winter season for the GWW Project (i.e. none recorded in winter 2013). During 2012 – 2013, each autumn there were five records while in spring 2012 there were five records and in spring 2013 eight records. This autumn, in 2014, there was just the one record.



Based on all records in the GWW, from 1900 to 2013, the Tawny Frogmouth occurs throughout the Great Western Woodlands, except in the very southern part where the vegetation is predominantly shrubs with very few trees.

Each season the GWW bird surveys builds on our database and expands our knowledge. The record of Tawny Frogmouth at Fraser Range this winter is the first for this area during 2012-2014. The remote winter survey this year extended the distribution of Tawny Frogmouths records in to the far east of the GWW.

Gisela Kaplan (2007) has written a book on the Tawny Frogmouth, full of great information (and available in the BirdLife WA library). Their diet includes mainly insects, arthropods, snails, slugs and the occasional mouse, frog and reptile. Their massive bill with its flat edges pulps their prey enabling birds to avoid the toxins of centipedes and sting of scorpions. Apparently Tawny Frogmouths do not drink water, provided their food sources are rich in fluids. They can take food on the wing, via short snatchings or hawking flights as well as picking up prey from the ground. They are very susceptible to insecticides used by people to kill their prey (cockroaches, snails, slugs).

Tawny Frogmouth pairs hold territories and appear to form strong bonds, usually roosting within 10-15m of each other

throughout the year. This distance between pairs can decrease during the breeding season (August to December), when they are often found roosting side by side. During the remote survey in early August, two birds were flushed together each time, with one bird flying higher in to a tree and the second 'disappearing', flying in a different direction.

Species in Focus RUFIOUS TREECREEPER



The Rufous Treecreeper is a medium sized bird (~17 cm long) that inhabits the woodlands and forests of southern Australia from Perth to Adelaide. The body and sides of the head are a distinctive cinnamon rufous colour with white streaks on the breast. The wings and tail are brown and grey. The male has distinctive black streaking on the breast. Juvenile birds have a darker plumage than adults with young males having stronger streaking in the upper breast area while young females have almost no streaking.

Rufous Treecreepers are endemic to Australia. Its scientific name is *Climacteris rufa* meaning 'rufous staircase-bird'. This species belongs to the family Climacteridae, a group of treecreepers found in Australia and Papua New Guinea.



Rufous Treecreepers forage by walking up and down the large trunks of eucalypt species, feeding mainly on insects. They also forage extensively on the ground. They live in family groups, are sedentary and hold territories.

Nesting occurs from August to January where one to two eggs are laid and young are raised with the help of their offspring from previous breeding seasons. Females can raise

up to three broods in a season.

The Rufous Treecreeper has a broad distribution and not unexpectedly occurs in a number of different woodland and forest types. They include the Jarrah-Marri Forest, Wandoo woodlands, Salmon Gum and Gimlet woodlands and other eucalypt species.

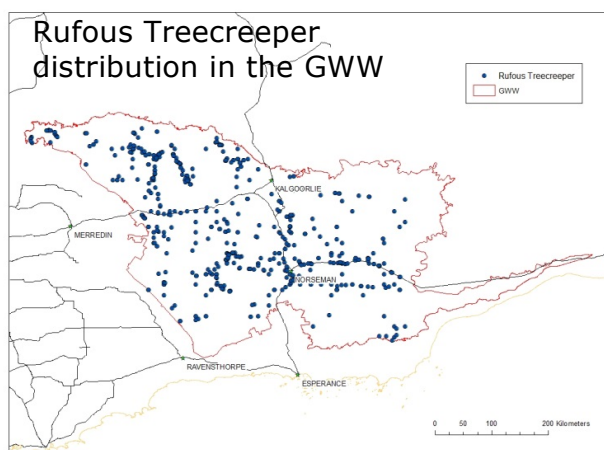
The Salmon Gum and Gimlet woodlands make up a significant part of the Great Western Woodlands. Outside the woodlands and forests, the Rufous Treecreeper occurs in the Victoria Desert where it is associated with Eucalypt and Sheoak trees. It is also said to occur in mallee.

Studies on the ecology of the Rufous Treecreeper in Jarrah-Marri Forest by Mike Craig indicated that these birds favoured the larger, taller more mature trees for foraging and nesting. This is also supported by the GWW data where Rufous Treecreepers preferred to occur among Gimlet woodlands greater than 150 years old.

Studies within the Wandoo woodlands of the Stirling Range National Park by Allan Rose indicated that the Rufous Treecreeper needed hollows for both roosting and nesting, a significant factor affecting its long term survival in a fragmented landscape. Studies by Gary Luck indicated that reproductive success, juvenile survival rates and food availability were all higher in an unfragmented landscape compared to a fragmented landscape. Grazing by stock was also found to have a significant effect reducing breeding success.

The Rufous Treecreeper has declined in abundance and distribution, particularly in the wheatbelt of Western Australia. Its status is however of *Least Concern* based on IUCN Red List Category. This is due to; its broad distribution (far greater than 20,000 km²), that its decline is not rapid (i.e. is not >30% over 10 years or three generations), and its current population is large (greater than 10,000 birds). Potential threats to the species include fragmentation through clearing, loss of large mature trees through clearing and logging and degradation of understorey by grazing.

Within the Great Western Woodlands the distribution of the Rufous Treecreeper is broad and includes numerous records, helped no doubt by the wide distribution of woodland habitat and this bird's audible, easily recognisable call and visibility when foraging (see map below).



What's On?

UPCOMING SURVEYS

It is now time to plan for the Spring 2014 surveys. We are aiming to get all nine areas surveyed this spring. Jilbadji and Cave Hill survey areas are a must do as they have still to be surveyed in spring. We are also planning to conduct a remote survey in the Great Western Woodlands this spring. People are also invited to take part in "Spring into Bungalbin", an initiative by The Wilderness Society to celebrate and promote Helena and Aurora Range and the Great Western Woodlands. The GWW Project and BirdLife WA are planning to have a stall and conduct birdwalks.

GWW SPRING SURVEY

27 September to 3 October 2014

Spring is a wonderful time to be in the Great Western Woodlands, a time when there is an abundance of flowering and bird activity before the hot weather starts. Would be wonderful if you could join us for a spring survey in the Great Western Woodlands.

FUTURE SURVEY DATES

The suggested survey dates for 2014 and 2015 are shown below. Please remember that all dates are flexible and surveys at any time within a season are appreciated. If you are keen to become involved either as a group leader or a participant, please contact Shapelle to lock in your preferences and to receive copies of the relevant information.

Spring 2014: 27 September–3 October including Queen's Birthday weekend

Summer 2014: 6 – 12 December

Autumn 2015: 4 – 10 April including Easter weekend OR 24 – 30 April including Anzac weekend

Spring 2015: 26 - September – 2 October including Queen's Birthday weekend



For more information about the project please contact:

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Photo: Tim Sargent

Timothy Sargent