

Woodlands on the Wing

Issue 11 Summer 2014/2015

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.

Summer surveys

Summer surveys were very rewarding in December 2014, with many birds active, some nesting and plenty of juvenile birds sighted with their parents. This is not to say conditions weren't hot, rather that there had been late spring and early summer rains in the Great Western Woodlands (GWW).



Cane Grass Lagoon (north-east of Credo Homestead)
December 2015 Photo: Jenny Moulton

Some areas of the GWW recorded more rain in spring than winter, this was particularly so at Norseman (October to November 147.8mm and June to August 53.6mm) creating very wet conditions on tracks and the cancellation of a planned trip to Dundas Nature Reserve in early December. Elsewhere, rainfall in October and November was in the range of 20-30mm each month. In December, Kalgoorlie-Boulder had 19.6mm on the first day and Fraser Range had 34mm rain on the 21st day.

December highlights at Credo

Trip Report by Jenny Moulton

At first, it seemed that a Credo summer survey might not go ahead, however, a serendipitous set of circumstances allowed for it to take place. The cancellation of an earlier survey to

Dundas, due to summer rain also meant that George and Linda Shevtsov joined us, bringing our numbers to five, together with Graham Johnson and Simon Girando.

We arrived in the late afternoon after a day on the road. Ever alert to the presence of birds, we noticed **Pied Butcherbird**, **Magpie-lark**, **White-winged Fairy-wren**, **Galah**, **Yellow-throated Miner** and a **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike**.

Tuesday was our first official day of surveying and we started early at site 5 which was the 'yabbie' dam close to the homestead. We could have stayed for hours watching the prolific birdlife around the water. Some highlights were a pair of **Pink-eared Ducks**, over twenty **Black-tailed Native-hens**, a family of **White-browed Babblers**, circling **Australian Hobby**, **Zebra Finches** coming in for a drink and a typically solitary **White-faced Heron**.

We then set out for Rowles Lagoon guided by the trusty GPS (which turned out to be quite simple to use after some frustrating trial and error). On the way, we drove past a wooded area where the track forks and noticed a bird on the ground that looked tantalisingly like a **White-browed Treecreeper**. We stopped the cars for a better look and were rewarded with not only a clear sighting of this bird, but also a **Chestnut Quail-thrush** and a **Red-capped Robin**.

Rowles Lagoon itself was not as exciting as we'd hoped probably because the water level was at four metres - too deep for most waterbirds. A couple of **Black-fronted Dotterels**, an **Australian Hobby**, **Black-tailed Native-hen** and **Wedge-tailed Eagle** were the most notable sightings.

Cane Grass Lagoon is a shallower neighbouring lagoon and hosted what seemed to us to be thousands of birds so we chose this as an extra survey site. Waterbirds in abundance included **Eurasian Coot**, **Black Swan**, **Black-winged Stilt**, **Hoary-headed Grebe**, **Grey Teal** and **Hardhead**. We also saw a pair of **Red-kneed Dotterels** and a **Black-fronted Dotterel**.



White-browed Treecreeper on *Casuarina pauper* trunks
Photo: Jenny Moulton

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A walk into the surrounding bush yielded a couple of juvenile **Jacky Winters** (who tested our identification skills until we spotted the parents), **Rainbow Bee-eaters**, a **Pied Butcherbird** and a female **Rufous Whistler**.

Crimson Chats were our next highlight and

were seen at site 16. This site was open heath and by now it was heating up so we were surprised at the variety of birds we saw. Apart from the chats, we saw **Zebra Finch**, **White-winged Fairy-wren**, **Singing Honeyeater**, **Nankeen Kestrel** and **Black-faced Woodswallow**.

We were done for the morning surveys and headed back to camp for lunch and a siesta. We attempted site 1 around 4pm but most birds were too smart to be out in the heat except for the sun-loving **Rainbow Bee-eaters** zipping about overhead and a lone family of **White-winged Fairy-wrens** who sensibly sought relief in the shade of the scrub.

Our second day of surveying was as exciting as our first. We started early at around 5am with some polite grumbling about the time. We headed north to Ularring Rock first stopping at site 23, which is *Eucalyptus* woodland just south of Callion. This site was fantastic. We saw a **Red-backed Kingfisher**, a **Chestnut Quail-thrush**, a **Brown Falcon**, a **Purple-crowned Lorikeet** and two **Mistletoebirds** as well as **Striated Pardalote**, **Australian Ringneck** and **Yellow-plumed Honeyeater**. Site 24 was next and was quite unremarkable (a few **Weebills** and **Australian Ravens**) which shocked us a little after the highs of our previous sightings. We did manage to spot a **Square-tailed Kite** overhead, definitely a highlight.

Site 25 was at the rock itself, which was spectacular. We arrived at 8.30am and it was already hot. **Richard's Pipit**, **Grey Currawong**, a pair of **Grey Shrike-thrush** and a **Rufous Whistler** were in the survey area. We had morning tea and saw a couple of Perentie as well as a lot of little birds around the picnic area including **Splendid Fairy-wren**, **Mistletoebird**, **Redthroat** and a couple of juvenile **Red-capped Robins**.



Juvenile Red-capped Robin
Photo: Jenny Moulton

It was getting very warm, however, we decided to stop at sites 18–21, as they were very close to each other. Had we checked the field notes, we would have known that these sites were a fair distance off the track and we wouldn't have spent half an hour driving around trying to find them. We stopped, mildly frustrated, and had lunch at an old, dry dam.

In spite of the heat this site had quite a few active woodland birds including **Rufous Treecreeper**, **Yellow-plumed Honeyeater**, **Grey Shrike-thrush**, **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike** and **Rainbow Bee-eater**. Eventually, we found site 18 where we saw **Rufous Treecreeper** and a family of **Black-faced Woodswallows**. It was very hot and already almost 2pm so we decided to head back to camp.

There were severe fire warnings for Friday, which meant we would have to cut a day off our survey. This was disappointing news but we decided to do a couple of early surveys on the Friday before the warning kicked in. As it turned out, it was just as well we decided to finish early because an unexpected storm blew in on Saturday that could have seen us stranded in Credo for Christmas!

On the third day we visited Corriding Rock, which was a fascinating area worth further exploration. There were numerous **White-browed Babblers** around and plenty of small bush birds like thornbills and fairy-wrens. It was already warm and a drive through the plains of sites 10 and 11, which were regenerating after a recent bushfire, yielded little in the way of birdlife but some magnificent *Eremophila* shrubs in flower much to everyone's delight.

Simon is a local and said he'd heard good things about the new chef at Ora Banda. The new "chef" turned out to be a sweet, young German backpacker who was apologetic about her limited experience in the kitchen. The food, however, was tasty and the setting was magic. We completed the conveniently located sites 3 and 4 on the way back to camp.



Christmas dinner at Credo Homestead

Photo: Jenny Moulton

In the evening we enjoyed a Christmas dinner of bush damper and freshly caught yabbies with the new caretakers, Rosalie and Don. They had arrived the previous day and immediately bedecked the homestead in Christmas decorations. We appreciated their hospitality and generosity immensely - what a great way to end our trip.

A highlight for Friday morning was site 12 where we saw **White-fronted Honeyeaters** working away at extracting breakfast from shrubs with their **Spiny-cheeked** mates. We were also stunned by large numbers of the very beautiful, hyperactive **Purple-crowned Lorikeets**.

By the end of the trip, we had become quite skilled at finding the 'post' that now marked the coordinate of each site, generating perhaps an unjustified amount of excitement and congratulatory praise amongst us.

Credo is an amazing place and this, coupled with fantastic company, made for a great week of surveying.

Other observations in December 2014

In addition to Credo Station, two other areas were surveyed: Helena and Aurora Range and Fraser Range, by Allan and Sandy Rose as they made their way across to Tasmania in December.

At Helena and Aurora Range there was still evidence of breeding activity. Five adult **White-winged Fairy-wrens** were seen with two fledglings that had no tails and were barely able to fly. Species that were found attending nests included **Willie Wagtail** (one adult sitting on two eggs: one adult building a nest one metre from the ground), **Rufous Whistler** (male feeding two downy chicks in a nest), **Rufous Treecreeper** (three adults entering tree hollow at least one carrying food) and **Tawny Frogmouth** (adult sitting on two chicks, one third grown, sheltering them from the sun).

Adults were seen with juvenile birds for **Red-capped Robin** (five different records), **Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater**,

Yellow-plumed Honeyeater, **Little Woodswallow**, **Dusky Woodswallow** (two records), **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike** and **Pied Butcherbird**.

Immature

Crested

Bellbird and

Grey Butcherbird were also sighted.

Some interesting sightings included two **Hooded Robins** and two **Gilbert's Whistlers**, three **Western Yellow Robins**, several **Redthroats** and both **Chestnut-rumped** and **Inland Thornbills**.

Fraser Range had lots of *Eremophila* in flower and some flowering eucalypts. Three species were found attending nests here; a **Yellow-plumed Honeyeater** feeding at least one young in a nest and another adult building a nest, a **Willie Wagtail** with three young in a nest, adult **Sacred Kingfishers** feeding two young in a tree hollow and an **Australian Magpie** observed sitting on a nest. There were also two immature **Pied Butcherbirds** and a **Weebill** collecting spider web.

Birds of prey are often a feature at Fraser Range and December was no exception with **Whistling Kite** (two adults and one juvenile), **Brown Goshawk** and **Nankeen Kestrel** sighted. Other interesting sightings were **White-backed Swallow**, **Mulga Parrot**, **Western Yellow Robin**, **Redthroats** (at five sites), **Common Bronzewing** and **Red-backed Kingfisher**.

Rainbow Bee-eaters were observed at all three areas surveyed in December 2015.



Juvenile Jacky Winter

Photo: Jenny Moulton

Notice

Star pickets now placed at fixed GWW survey sites

In November 2014, Andy Chapman, with assistance from Digby Knapp, set out to place star pickets at each of the fixed GWW survey sites – a total of 230 sites over the nine survey areas.



Each star picket has a plastic yellow cap and metal tag with the site number.

To make it clearer where to survey, there will no longer be any fixed sites coordinates that place you in the middle of the road, track, car park or picnic area. They are now placed typically 100m off the side of the road so it is easy to identify which patch of bush to survey.

An updated list of fixed site coordinates together with brief notes as to the location of each site will be included in the GWW folders provided to each Participant and Leader.

If you have any concerns or queries please contact Maris and Shapelle on email: gww@birdlife.org.au

Notice

The fixed sites, for the nine GWW survey areas, ARE NOW ON

birdata



as GROUP SITES

This is especially helpful for those who like to enter their GWW bird observations using **Birdata** rather than Atlas Forms.

The site information provided in **Birdata** (GPS coordinate and 'how to get there' notes) is also useful for those travelling through the area and would like to conduct bird surveys at some fixed sites.

Please Note: If you want to add observations for extra GWW sites via **Birdata** then enter using **'my data'** rather than **'group site'**.

If you have any queries in regard to the GWW Group sites please contact Libby McGill and Shapelle McNee on, email: gww@birdlife.org.au

Species in Focus

REDTHROAT



Male Redthroat

Photo: Mark Binns

The Redthroat is an arid country, sedentary scrubwren or 'desert warbler', 12 cm long. The male has a distinctive rufous throat, in contrast to the pale off-white or cream throat of the female. Both sexes have off-white feathers speckled on the forehead, and in the lores and eyebrow. The outer blackish-brown tail feathers are tipped white and obvious when the bird is in flight. Overall, is predominantly grey-brown above and pale-grey below with pale buff colour on sides of belly to rich buff on flanks and vent.

The Redthroat feeds predominantly on insects such as beetles and ants, occasionally on seeds. They occur in *Acacia* shrublands with chenopods including mulga saltbush and bluebush species. They also occur in eucalypt woodlands over *Acacia* shrublands, as well as dense mallee shrubland near granite outcrops, along drainage lines and paperbark thickets.

John Gould first named this bird in 1840, *Sericornis brunneus*. *Sericornis* meaning 'silk-bird' referring to its silky plumage and *brunneus* meaning brown and referring to its brown "flame-throat". The Redthroat is more recently referred to by the scientific name of *Pyrholaemus brunneus* Gould 1841. *Pyrholaemus* translates to 'flame throat'.

The Redthroat has a distribution across the arid lands of mainland Australia, effectively from Western Australia to the Great Dividing Range. This species occurs throughout most of Western Australia (except for the South West, Kimberley and inland areas of the Nullarbor) and most of South Australia (with the exception of the Sturt Stony Desert in the north-east corner and Port Lincoln, York Peninsular, Kangaroo Island and Mt Gambia to the south). The remaining mainland states are situated on the edge of its distribution where it occurs in the south-west corners of Northern Territory and Queensland, the western third of New South Wales and north-west corner of Victoria.

The international status of the Redthroat is of Least Concern due to its broad distribution and that, although it is recognised that populations are decreasing in some areas of its distribution population, it has not decreased to vulnerable levels.



Male Redthroat singing

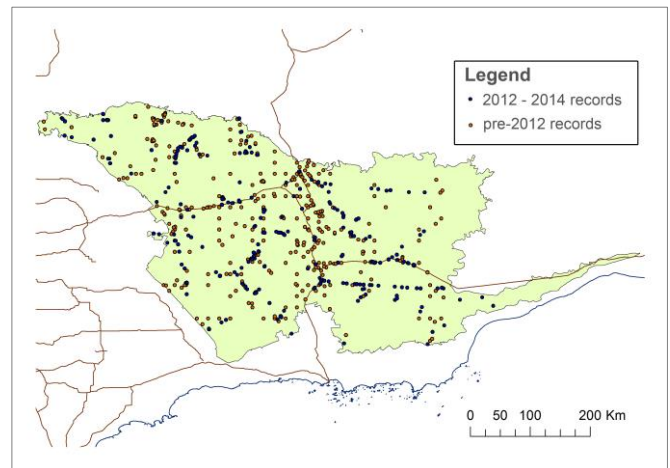
Photo: Mark Binns

The status of the Redthroat varies between states, reflecting the level of declines observed. In Victoria the Redthroat is listed as Endangered, in NSW as Vulnerable and in Queensland and Northern Territory as Near Threatened. The Redthroat is not listed in Western Australia or South Australia.

Reasons for the declines observed are vegetation clearing and degradation of habitat from grazing (e.g. in NSW and on parts of the Nullarbor). In NSW they are also suspected to be vulnerable to predation by foxes and cats.

In the GWW the Redthroat has a broad distribution. The most recent records during the last three years of surveys indicate that the Redthroat has been observed at each of the nine survey areas.

Distribution of Redthroat in the GWW



Surveying at Credo

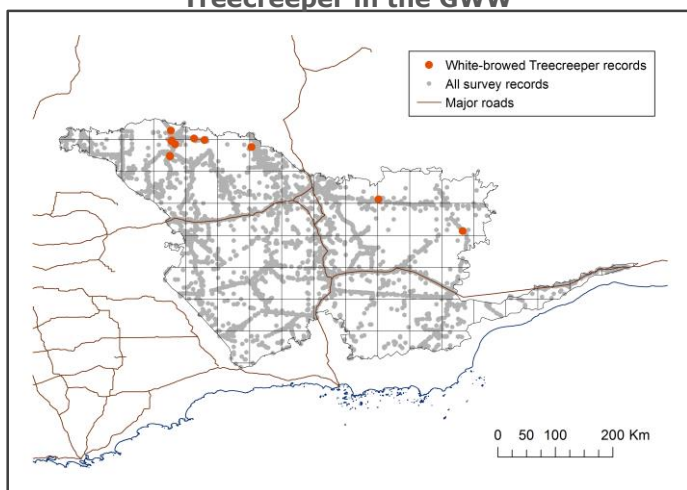
Photo: Jenny Moulton

Occurrence of White-browed Treecreeper

The sighting of a White-browed Treecreeper at Credo in December 2014 is an uncommon record in the Great Western Woodlands. There have been about 30 records since 1904. The northern area of the GWW is situated on the southern edge of the White-browed Treecreeper distribution in Western Australia. A local bird watcher from Kalgoorlie, Scott Corbett, described this species as very quiet and occurring in the Black Oak or Belah (*Casuarina pauper*) Woodlands south of Credo towards Coolgardie.

Most records of White-browed Treecreeper in the GWW have been in the north west corner, from Credo to Windarling Range. During a BAWA Rangeland survey in 2008 the White-browed Treecreeper was sighted in the vicinity of the Windarling, Mt Jackson and Mt Manning Ranges as well as at Diemals. These records are shown in the map below.

Recent records (post 2000) of White-browed Treecreeper in the GWW



The distribution of White-browed Treecreeper coincides reasonably strongly with the distribution of *Casuarina pauper* (as shown on Florabase). Stands of *Callitris* trees (native pine) are also used by this species and may determine to some extent where it occurs. Within the GWW, the records shown on the distribution map (above) coincide with the larger known areas of *Casuarina pauper* (i.e. Koolyanobbing to Windarling, Credo to east of Kalgoorlie and north of Balladonia in the north-east corner).

Ventures in to the GWW for video footage

Days before the close of 2014, the GWW Funding sub-committee decided a video to promote the GWW project would greatly help fund raising efforts as well as help raise awareness for the project. Preferably, to be put together in the next few months.

Now, January is not the best month for birds or people out in the GWW due to dry, hot and often windy conditions. January 2015 proved to be all these things for two film crews that

headed out into the GWW to get video footage. Steve Keeling and Ted Collinson spent three days at Credo videoing and photographing birds. Their patience, hard work and tenacity paid off with video footage and stills of **Mulga Parrots, Rufous and White-browed Treecreepers, Hooded Robin, Jacky Winter, juvenile Crested Bellbird and Yellow-plumed Honeyeater Brown Falcon, Dusky Woodswallow, Richard's Pipit, Banded Plover and Brown Falcon.** Thank goodness for at least one slight, short lull in the estimated 40 knot winds.



Ted Collinson photographing birds at Credo
Shot from video by Steve

The second video expedition aim was to get shots of the landscape, vegetation and people doing bird surveys. A group of four people headed out on 22nd January for five days with draft script, list of shots and detailed itinerary in hand. The group included Simon James (videographer), David Dring (assistant videographer and camp cook), Terry Powell (leader and navigator) and Chris Thorne (photographer). The vegetation along the Hyden-Norseman Road and Cave Hill area was in amazingly good condition for January with plenty of mallee, *Kunzea* and *Grevillea* in flower.



Video crew at work

Photo: Terry Powell

Special thanks to Sue and Rolf Meeking, and Dogger Stuart McEwan, who's local knowledge made all the difference for finding the good spots to get the shots.

This was truly an outstanding effort by everyone, including the birds, which we suspect would not have been out and about except for the late spring and early summer rains.

Looking After the Nest

INTRODUCING THE NEW
SURVEY COORDINATOR:
MARIS LAUVA

AND ASSISTANTS: NOLA
KUNNEN AND LIBBY MCGILL



Maris Lauva (centre)
with Libby McGill (left) and Nola Kunnen (right)

Maris is a relative newcomer to birding, having discovered a passion for birds since his retirement. During the 8 years of his BirdLife membership he has participated in many surveys of various types including two in the GWW. He is keen to provide the support and information people need to carry out enjoyable surveys, having seen it from that side himself.

Nola and Libby will be assisting Maris in coordinating the GWW surveys. Nola and Libby have a passion for the GWW and in ensuring that the regular bird survey program continues, an essential part of the GWW Committee's role.

Still a relative newcomer to birding, Nola has enjoyed several visits to the GWW in recent years, both for surveys and when travelling with interstate and overseas visitors. Libby has been interested in birds from a very young age and belonged to organised bird clubs for many years. She was associated with the South African Bird Atlas project for ten years before relocating to Australia where her interests include the GWW, Atlasing and travel.



Eucalyptus blossom at Credo in Dec. 2015
Photo: Jenny Moulton

What's On?

UPCOMING SURVEYS

GWW AUTUMN SURVEY

4 to 10 April or 24-30 April 2015

Autumn is a wonderful time to be out in the Great Western Woodlands. There is the possibility that the eucalypts, observed in full blossom in December and January this summer, will still be flowering in April. Would be great to survey as many of the nine areas as possible. The Autumn surveys are planned for either early in April, including the Easter long weekend or if this time does not suit, late in April over the Anzac Day long weekend.

DATES FOR THE 2015 GWW AUTUMN AND SPRING SURVEYS

The suggested survey dates are listed below for the autumn and spring surveys in 2015. Please remember that all dates are flexible and surveys at any time within seasons or outside these two seasons are appreciated. If you are keen to become involved either as a group leader or a participant, please contact Maris to lock in your preferences and to receive copies of the relevant information. Contact email address: gww@birdlife.org.au

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

Spring 2015: 5 – 11 September
26 - September – 2 October including Queen's
Birthday weekend



For more information about the project please contact:

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