

# Woodlands on the Wing

Issue 12 Autumn 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.*

## Autumn surveys

There was both sunshine and rain for volunteers during the Autumn 2015 bird surveys. Although the Easter weekend was dry there were heavy rains the following week. By the second week of May the winds had picked up affecting the last few days of a remote survey



Brush Bronzewing (male) fluffed up in the cold. Photo: Mark Binns

south of Dundas Nature Reserve by Mark Binns and Wayne O'Sullivan. Photos showed that there were pools of water sitting on granite outcrops and also on tracks.

The planned Helena and Aurora Range survey in April, following the BirdLife WA campout at Jaurdi, was cancelled due to the impending wet weather and windy conditions. Undeterred, Sue Abbotts together with Kerry Cowie, Chris Wilder and Terry Powell conducted a successful survey of all the sites in May. Surveys were also conducted at Karroun Hill, Fraser Range, Transline (in the rain again!), Dundas, Cave Hill, Karlkurla Bushland Park and Mt Ridley.

## Karroun Hill in Autumn Trip Report by Maris Lauva

Mark Henryon and I came from Perth in the one vehicle, leaving at 8:30am on 24 April. Laura Ruykyus and Nat Staniford travelled together in the second vehicle leaving from Mt Gibson in the late afternoon and arriving that evening at the pre-arranged location. For Mark and I, Bimbijy Road, which leads through the reserve, started sealed and even when it became gravel was well maintained. Surveys were done on the way at sites KH19, 10 and 7 before making

birds are in our nature

camp. There were campsites aplenty in this area – lots of open woodland.

The next day, we surveyed the remaining north-west sites together. We walked from the road towards the stake and commenced the survey as soon as we were in the described habitat. We operated as two pairs but remained in contact. All marker stakes were easily found even in thick scrub. On average the GPS showed a variation of 20-40m from the recorded location coordinate (moves are afoot to include one decimal second to improve accuracy).

Three sites, KH1, 2 and 21 were located in very thick Acacia scrub where movement through it was difficult and noisy.

We eventually devised a systematic way to survey these dense sites. We walked into the site, stopped to listen for bird calls then walked



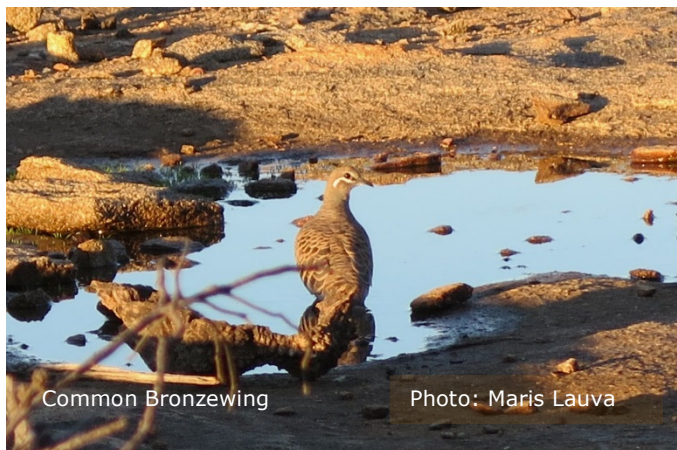
Marker stake at KH1  
Photo: Maris Lauva

further in to the site to stop and listen again. We did this three times to cover the 2ha. Our success in locating birds by sound was largely thanks to Mark "Mr. Super ears". My bionic ears were no help as the batteries were flat!



Photo: Maris Lauva

The north-west sites were completed by mid afternoon. Camp was then packed up and we headed for the south-east corner. It was decided to leave the sites on the way there for the last day, as we had to pass them going out. The track along the State Barrier Fence on the north side was largely in good condition for much of the way but great care had to be taken as there were bits of discarded fencing wire strewn about. We were entertained for a while by an **Emu** keeping pace with us on the other side of the fence. Travel along the southern side of the fence after site KH21 is recommended, as the track there seems more often used and better maintained. There is a gate to the east of KH21 (needed a heave but opened OK). We camped near what is referred to as the 'Three-ways' corner arriving at last light.



Common Bronzewing

Photo: Maris Lauva

Thickets aside, the woodlands were easy walking with good viewing distances. Everything was pretty much flat. Given the almost complete lack of fruiting and flowering we found a satisfactory number of species, usually around 10 or more per site. For all the lack of blossom, **Red Wattlebird**, **Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater**, **White-fronted Honeyeater** and **White-eared Honeyeater** abounded. The dominant thornbills were **Chestnut-rumped Thornbill** and **Inland Thornbill** with lots of **Weebills** thrown in.

On the third day we headed north to site KH17. All sites were east of the fence. To access the track east of the fence we crossed east at the Three-ways. Travel on the western side is to be avoided (it is also very overgrown).

After KH18 we continued east and then south along a track that appeared to be little used. Although not rough, it was at times quite overgrown (regrowth after a fire) and in several places trees had fallen across. Some detours had been created previously but at two places the falls were recent and we had to make our own. Because of the slow travel we were not able to do the last three sites on this route. Once again, we were into camp around nightfall.

From our camp, we had only a few kilometres to travel back to pick up the three sites we missed the previous day, KH11, 12 & 13. We then returned to camp, packed up and went for the most southerly site, KH22. The best way to KH22 is to return to the Three-ways and travel along the southern side of the fence - which then gives access to the track heading south to the site.

Back at the fence and heading west, we found the gate before site KH21 and continued on the north side of the fence to site KH20, which completed the survey.

We identified two species that can be added to the Karroun Hill bird list. An adult **Black-breasted Buzzard** (a juvenile had also been seen in spring 2014 - just not yet on the list) that was flushed from a tree along the eastern boundary of the reserve. It later flew overhead. **Torresian Crow** was identified by having a good long listen to them calling (from sightings alone their identification would have been uncertain). **Malleefowl** were seen twice towards the south-east corner, once in the late evening and once in the early morning. We saw Malleefowl tracks in several other locations.

**Gilbert's Whistler** was heard in a couple of places, and a **Horsfield's Bronze-cuckoo** was seen. The best sighting may have been a pair of **Hooded Robins** at site KH13. A **Red-capped Robin** and **Western Gerygone** were also seen. **Emus** were spotted three times along the southern fence (one timed at 50kph for quite a distance). Dog tracks were everywhere. "Frog" the Dogger who works this area has his work cut out for him.

Weather was blissfully mild, 10°C - 25°C, little wind and clear.

## Other observations in Autumn 2015

Some interesting sightings during Autumn 2015, of birds not always regularly seen across the survey areas were: **Hooded Robins** at Cave Hill, Dundas, Helena and Aurora Range, Karroun Hill and Transline; **Little Crow** at Cave Hill, Helena and Aurora Range, and Karroun Hill; **Australian Owlet Night-jar** at Fraser Range, Helena and Aurora Range, and Transline; **Western Rosella** at Cave Hill, Dundas and Transline.

An immature **Western Rosella** was also located during the BirdLife WA Jaurdi campout, which initially caused some confusion. Fortunately photos of the bird enabled Ron Johnston of WA Museum to confirm its identification as the inland **Western Rosella**. This is the most northern record for this species.



Hooded Robin

Photo: Mark Binns

It may have been a bit early for cuckoos as there were only three records, a **Fan-tailed Cuckoo** on the Transline, **Pallid Cuckoo** at Fraser Range and **Horsfields Bronzewing** at Karroun Hill.

## Cave Hill

In the Cave Hill survey area some of the highlights were **Shy Heathwrens, Redthroats** and 50 plus **Dusky Woodswallows** coming in to roost on a dead tree. Other highlights were the **Varied Sittellas, Hooded Robins** and **Jacky Winters** (twenty counted within an area search). At McDermid rock participants woke to the calls of **Purple-gaped Honeyeaters**. Other sightings included **Western Yellow Robin, Blue-breasted Fairy-wren** and the three whistlers **Golden Whistler, Rufous Whistler** and **Gilbert's Whistler**.

## Fraser Range

Fraser Range turned up its usual array of raptors with **Brown Falcon, Wedge-tailed Eagle, Australian Hobby** and **Whistling Kite**. There were also **Red-tailed Black Cockatoos, Redthroats** (six sightings), **Southern Scrub-robins, White-browed Babbler, Crested Bellbird** and **Hoary-headed**

**Grebes** (on a dam at site FR32). A total of nine species of honeyeater were recorded including the **Purple-gaped Honeyeater**.

Ed Paull reported that there is now mobile coverage for Telstra users at Fraser Range including along the Eyre Highway and two thirds of the way along the north-east track on the survey route.



Male Blue-breasted Fairy-wren  
Photo: Ed Paull

## Helena and Aurora Range

During the Helena and Aurora Range survey there were three pools of water at Kurrajong Rocks where **Major Mitchell's Cockatoo** were seen coming in to drink. There were also four **Crested Bellbirds** in the area. While sitting at another pool of water, the next day at 8:00am, many honeyeaters came in to drink plus another nine species consisting of the **Major Mitchell's Cockatoo, Galah, Australian Ringneck, Mulga Parrot, Redthroat, Southern White-face, Chestnut-rumped Thornbill, Crested Pigeon** and **Common Bronzewing**. Also noteworthy were **Varied Sittellas** and **White-winged Fairy-wrens**.

## Dundas

During the first four days of the remote survey, Mark Binns and Wayne O'Sullivan surveyed the Dundas survey area sites. Ten **Western Rosellas** were sighted, in addition to **Mulga Parrots, Australian Ringnecks** and **Purple-crowned Lorikeets**. Other interesting sightings included **Crimson Chat, Silvereye, Shy Heathwren, Western Yellow Robin, Spotted Pardalote** (seven records),

**Chestnut Quail-thrush, Crested Bellbird, Redthroat** and **White-browed Babbler**.

## Transline

Although the Transline survey was cut short due to heavy rains, 12 sites were surveyed including a good range of species. Among these, there were **Mulga Parrots, Australian Ringnecks** and **Purple-crowned Lorikeets** as well as **Crested Bellbird, Gilbert's Whistler, Rufous treecreeper, White-winged Fairy-wren** and **Zebra Finch**.

## Karlkurla Bushland Park

Karlkurla Bushland Park was surveyed early with a 7am start on a Saturday morning in April. Greg Harewood, who was visiting Kalgoorlie at the time, joined the Goldfields Naturalists' Club survey to share his expertise, which was greatly appreciated. Some of the bird species seen were; **Mistletoebird, White-browed Babbler, Chestnut-rumped Thornbill, Striated Pardalote, Weebill** and eight honeyeater species including the **Red Wattlebird, Yellow-throated Miner, Brown Honeyeater, White-fronted Honeyeater, Yellow-plumed Honeyeater, Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater, White-eared Honeyeater** and **Singing Honeyeater**.

## Mt Ridley

The BirdLife WA campout at Esperance included a GWW survey at Mt Ridley accessible on a good unsealed road north east of Esperance. Twenty-six species were located during an hour survey. The highlights of the survey were **Australian Owlet-nightjar, Purple-crowned Lorikeet, Western Spinebill** and **Southern Scrub-robin**. The mallee blossom had brought many honeyeaters, **White-eared, New Holland, Tawny-crowned, Brown-headed, Brown** and **Red Wattlebird**. The campout attendees and the Esperance regulars had a great day. Mt Ridley is a top place for an overnight or several days camping with good sites to camp, barbeques and pit toilets, plus many birds.

### Notice

#### GPS Training Available

Maris is offering GPS training to anyone going on a GWW bird survey. Can be with your own GPS or with a GWW Garmin Etrex20 GPS.

A short indoor session will be followed by a practical field exercise. The training session includes:

- Understanding Latitude and Longitude
- Marking, editing and using waypoints.
- Finding specific locations.
- Using Track manager and Trip manager to maintain awareness of where you are.

The session can be tailored to people's needs.

If you would like to book a GPS training session please contact Maris, email: [gww@birdlife.org.au](mailto:gww@birdlife.org.au)



At Fraser Range

Photo: Ed Paull

## Reflections of a First Time Leader

By Nigel Sutherland

Having been approached to lead a small group of 5 people to do a trip to the Cave Hill area and conduct some GWW surveys, I agreed for various reasons. I had the time, I enjoying birding and felt that it was an opportunity for me to do something concrete in return for the many pleasurable hours of recreational birding that I have done over the last 15 years or so.

I have always been a believer in preparation. I think that if you are properly prepared it is half the job done, so I prepared as best I could for the trip. Maris and Shapelle had provided excellent information and instruction packs, both for leaders and participants and these proved to be most helpful. Also Maris spent an afternoon training two of us on the use of GPS, both theoretical and practical. This was invaluable to me as I had at that point very limited knowledge and almost no practical experience of using a GPS in the field, and would not have been very confident about it without the training. My preparation included the usual checks on weather forecasts, road conditions, safety, fuel required and that sort of thing. I also roughed out a plan as to how we would approach doing the surveys to make best use of the limited time we had on site.

The surveys themselves were successful, and the admin work I had to do was not onerous in any way. We made a point of making the notes and records we needed immediately after each survey onto the Atlas sheets, before our memories had a chance to get clouded.

Some points listed below I found worked well. Mostly they are common sense leadership requirements.

Arrive with a plan that will cover the objectives of the trip. Share this with the team and make minor alterations if necessary, but stick to the plan. Major changes during the project are likely to be disruptive.

Delegate and make use of other people's skills and expertise. For example, one lady on the team had very good knowledge of the vegetation, so I asked her to take charge of the vegetation questionnaire for each survey site.

Do not let the admin work and recording get behind, but do it after each site survey. When doing 6 surveys in a day I guess you could get a bit confused as to what you saw where and when.

It must be enjoyable for everyone, which in this case I think it was. We had a day off to do our own thing that everyone enjoyed, and we still ended up with 2 area searches and one site survey on that day.

Socialising round the campfire over dinner in the evening was very pleasant. Different thoughts and ideas were exchanged and we got to know each other.

My recommendation for future GWW surveys at Cave Hill would be as follows:

- If in one team, you would probably need five days to survey all the sites and be prepared to move camp at least twice.
- With two or three teams all the sites in the area could probably be covered in one or two days, starting at each end of Victoria Rock Track

## Species in Focus

WHITE-EARED HONEYEATER

By Mark Henryon



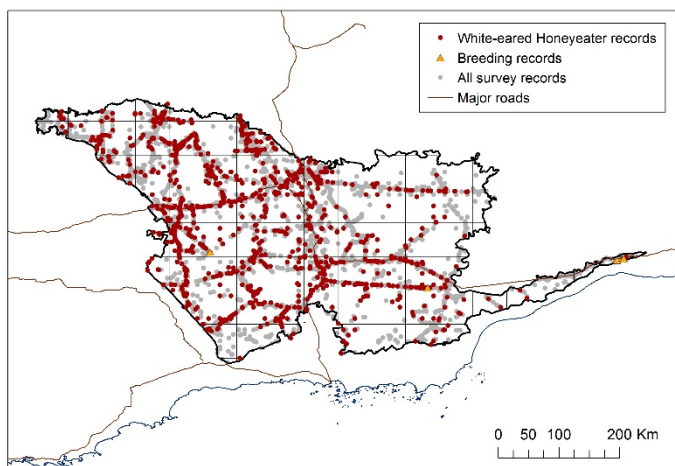
Photo: Mark Henryon

The White-eared Honeyeater (*Lichenostomus leucotis novaenoriae*) is an iconic species of the GWW with a cheeky habit of landing on people to collect hair from their heads or material from their clothing to line their nests.

The White-eared Honeyeater is common throughout the Great Western Woodlands and regularly observed at the nine survey areas (see map below). The GWW provides the species with large tracts of preferred habitat: undisturbed

mallee and eucalypt woodlands, usually where trees have peeling bark and there is a shrub understory. Much of this habitat to the west and south of the GWW has been cleared and numbers of White-eared Honeyeaters in these areas have declined. This suggests that an intact GWW will provide a future stronghold for the species in Western Australia.

### Distribution of White-eared Honeyeater in the GWW



White-eared Honeyeaters are attractive birds. Adults have olive-green upper parts and pale green under parts shading to a soft yellow underbelly. Their beak, face, and throat are black, their crown is grey, and they have large white ear-patches that are distinctive and diagnostic. Young birds are duller and browner with an olive-green crown. Sexes have similar plumages, but the males are larger than females (18-21cm versus 16-19cm). Males are about the size of Singing Honeyeaters, females can be as small as New Holland Honeyeaters, and pairs can often be sexed when compared directly.

These birds are conspicuous and noisy. The first sign of their presence is often their deep and mellow calls that can be heard throughout the year: 'kwitchu, kwitchu', 'cherrywhit cherrywhit', and 'chock-chock-chock-chock-chock'. They are usually seen alone or in pairs and occasionally in small family groups.



Photo: Clive Nealon

White-eared Honeyeaters are sedentary or locally nomadic and form long-term territories. This reflects their diet. They feed predominately on insects, insect by-products (manna, lerp, and honeydew),

and spiders. These food sources are available within their territories throughout the year. Individuals forage beneath loose, peeling, and hanging bark, between bark crevices, and amongst foliage of eucalypts and understory shrubs. Nectar, pollen, and fruits are taken when available.

The species usually nests in low shrubs or trees. The nest is built with dry grass, fine stems, and bark. It is bound with spider webbing and lined with soft plant down, feathers, hair, fur, and clothing material. The female incubates 2-3 eggs alone, but both parents feed the young. When breeding, males can become aggressive towards other honeyeaters, usually smaller species, within the pair's territory. Their nests are parasitized by the Fan-tailed Cuckoo, Pallid Cuckoo, Horsfield's Bronze-cuckoo and Shining Bronze-cuckoo.

White-eared Honeyeaters in the GWW are part of a western population of the *novaenoriae* subspecies. The conservation status of this subspecies is secure throughout its range from Western Australia to Queensland. The western population of *novaenoriae* is isolated from the eastern population at the head of the Great Australian Bight, leading some to suggest it is a distinct subspecies. Two other subspecies exist: *leucotis* along coastal eastern Australia and *thomasi* on Kangaroo Island.

## A Big Thank You!

The first phase of the Great Western Woodlands Project, part funded for three years by The Nature Conservancy, has now drawn to a close and Liz and Shapelle would like to thank everyone for their tireless efforts, enthusiasm and support for the Project and its bird surveys. *We truly appreciated people's skills, adventurous spirit and dedication to the birds and the wonderful places where they live in the GWW.*

From autumn 2012 to spring 2014, volunteers recorded a total of 181 bird species in the GWW (214 species have been recorded in the GWW since 1901), 152 participants worked together as teams of two to eight people and conducted 54 trips over 12 seasons. Survey effort was greatest in autumn and spring where up to seven of the nine sites were surveyed. Although autumn and spring are when birds are most active and the weather is kindest to volunteers (particularly in regard to extreme temperatures), rainfall was often unpredictable with heavy rains making access to some survey areas impossible at any time of year (including summer!).

By spring 2014, the number of surveys per survey area was fairly evenly distributed. Frank Hann/Peak Charles and Fraser Range had eight surveys, Helena and Aurora Range seven surveys, Credo, Dundas and Transline six surveys, and Karroun Hill five surveys. Due to the special efforts and focus of participants during 2014, the number of surveys for Cave Hill and Jilbadji increased from one and two surveys each to five and four surveys respectively.

Liz and Tegan Douglas have produced a glossy colour booklet that summarises the findings of the first three years of GWW bird surveys. **A copy will be sent to all participants** (in August or September 2015), and copies will be available from the BirdLife WA office.

Liz has also been preparing a detailed technical report for the first three years of the project with assistance from Tegan and the project's Technical Advisory Group. Only a limited number of copies will be printed, however, it will be available on line and a copy will be in the BirdLife WA Library.

# Changes in the GWW Committee

Now that Liz and Shapelle have finished their contracts the management of the GWW Project has become an entirely voluntary effort. We haven't lost Liz and Shapelle entirely though, they continue involvement as members of the committee. Alasdair Bulloch has taken up the role of Chair. A down to earth and practical guy he is an excellent choice to guide the project in the coming years. We have been able to gather a group of people with a good mix of skills to ensure the surveys continue and that the data being produced will provide a solid base for conservation efforts in the GWW.

## RAISING AWARENESS OF GWW

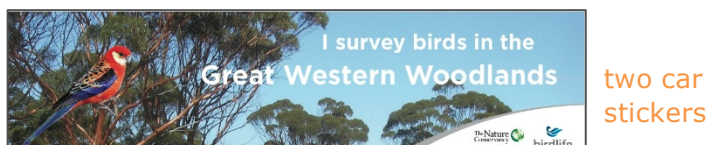
One of the important tasks of the GWW Committee is to inform people about the Great Western Woodlands and its conservation value for birds. We are now in a position to get serious about attending appropriate public events and spreading the word, informing people of its wonders.

For road show usage we have a strongly branded marquee, three eye catching pull up banners, a large area map and a range of promotional handouts, shown below.

two postcards

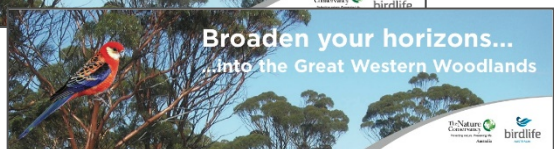


a bookmark



two car stickers

Also as a handout there is a pictorial



A3 sheet including a road map of the GWW. All a just reflection of the woodlands

Events so far suggested are:

- Spring into Bungalbin (Southern Cross)
- National Threatened Bird Species Day
- National Bird Week
- South Coast Festival of Birds (Albany)

Naturally, anything that we do depends on our volunteers giving yet more of their time to the GWW. We would welcome hearing from anyone who can assist. Any suggestions of events we should consider are more than welcome.

## What's On?

### UPCOMING SURVEYS

#### GWW SPRING SURVEY

5 to 11 September or 26 September to 2 October 2015

Spring can be an exciting time to be out in the Great Western Woodlands and it would be great to survey as many of the nine areas as possible. Two survey dates for spring are planned, either early in September or the last week of September including the Queens' Birthday long weekend.

#### DATES FOR GWW SURVEYS

The suggested survey dates are listed below for surveys in Spring 2015 and Autumn 2016. Please remember that all dates are flexible and surveys at any time within seasons or outside the season are appreciated. If you are keen to become involved either as a group leader or participant, please contact Maris to lock in your preferences and to receive copies of the relevant information. Contact email address: [gww@birdlife.org.au](mailto:gww@birdlife.org.au)

Spring 2015: 5 – 11 September  
26 September – 2 October  
(includes Queen's Birthday weekend)

Autumn 2016: 25 – 31 March (includes Easter)  
23 – 29 April (includes Anzac Day)



For more information about the project please contact:

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Great Western Woodlands bird surveys

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