

# Woodlands on the Wing

Issue 13 Summer 2015-2016

*The Great Western Woodlands in Western Australia is the world's largest remaining temperate woodland. The Birds of the Great Western Woodlands (GWW) Project aims to assess distribution, population status, movements and ecology of the bird species in the region, to better inform the conservation and management of this significant region. The Great Western Woodlands Committee (BirdLife WA) oversees the project, which is now in its fifth year. The first three and a half years (2012 to 2015) were funded by a partnership between BirdLife Australia and The Nature Conservancy*

## Spring surveys

Spring in 2015 brought sunny skies and little rain until November when scattered storms rolled in. While the regular GWW surveys were unaffected by rain, the Spring remote survey experienced heavy rain over several days, a challenge for sure!

Spring surveys were conducted at Credo, Helena and Aurora Range, Jilbadji and the Transline. Several of the sites at Fraser Range were surveyed by travellers moving interstate. Karlkurla Bushland Park was surveyed on 11 October. A remote survey (of the under surveyed less accessible areas) was conducted north of Eyre Highway to north of the Transline from 23 October to 14 November.

## Jaurdi to Helena and Aurora Range return

### Trip Report by Boyd Wykes and Peter St-Clair Baker

My primary goal in joining the Easter Jaurdi campout in 2015 was to head on from there to help conduct GWW bird surveys in the Helena and Aurora Range. Jaurdi is located at the southern end of the GWW survey route for Helena & Aurora Range. Regardless, I highly recommend Jaurdi Conservation Reserve as a birding destination in its own right, having

**birds are in our nature**



**Purple-crowned Lorikeets**  
Photo: Boyd Wykes

spent a most enjoyable campout there. As the autumn survey of Helena & Aurora Range (post the Jaurdi campout) was thwarted by rain, I returned in September with my Margaret River birding friend Peter St-Clair Baker on the way back from a bird survey project at Charles Darwin Reserve. My brother and his partner drove over from Victoria to join us, to provide backup and pursue their botanical interests.

Our two Subaru Foresters proved equal to the challenges of negotiating the 400km of tracks in the survey loop which heads north from Koolyanobbing (accessed via Great Eastern Highway and Southern Cross) through Helena & Aurora Range, up to Pittosporum Rocks then south down through Jaurdi Station (east of Koolyanobbing and north of the Trans Australian Railway). In contrast, heading home to Margaret River on the Holland Track south of Coolgardie was a nightmare once the rain started and I have read reports that the same conditions are true of the Helena & Aurora track once wet.

The Helena & Aurora Range is a banded ironstone formation (BIF) of iron and silica laid down slowly as sediment in a large, warm inland sea of a young Earth almost two billion years ago. Some of our earliest life forms, bacteria gaining energy from volcanic rather than solar energy, were likely involved. Another extraordinary feature of the BIFs of this area and the better known ranges at Karijini is that the formations remain in large as they were laid down in an area that has seen little distortion despite the tremendous changes in the Earth's crust since that time. I had been keen to see more of WA's BIFs since reading Peter Lane's "Geology of Western Australia's National Parks", and the Helena & Aurora Range jumped to the top of my bucket list as the State Government prevaricated over upholding a recommendation from the EPA to not permit the range to be mined. The Wilderness Society is currently



**Little Woodswallow**  
Photo: Boyd Wykes

campaigning for the Range to be included in an A-Class reserve /National Park to ensure its protection.

For the record, our survey took five days over which we conducted the 25 fixed points and 16 additional 20 minute/2 ha Atlas counts plus several '500m' longer area searches when we stopped for lunch and the night. Hard work for just one pair of surveyors. Two pairs would have made for a more relaxed program. The stakes marking the centroids of the sites were relatively easy to find using the GPS coordinates and additional notes provided. The only difficulty was confusion associated with the extensive network of mining tracks and haul roads with their associated intrusion of noise and traffic.

The route encompassed a wonderful variety of landforms and habitats, including expanses of low saltbush and bluebush heath; thickets of mallee and gimlet; acacia-sheoak scrub on sand; woodlands of Salmon Gum and Morrel; granite outcrops with water-holes and the gorges and ridges of the Helena & Aurora Range itself. A satisfying total of 62 bird species were recorded, with another approximately 50 species being on the list for this area ignoring the waterbirds that appear after rains!

Many GWW birds are known to move large distances tracking resources such as blossom but small insectivores such as fairy-wrens are presumably pretty sedentary. I was therefore surprised not to record a **Blue-breasted Fairy-wren** for the trip given good sightings at Jaurdi Station six months earlier.

Highlights for me included a glass of wine around our campfire at sunset on a peak of the Helena & Aurora Range, a cosy camp in the middle of a dense grove of copper-trunked Gimlet, close encounters with **Copper-backed Quail-thrush** and **Gilbert's Whistler**, and finding a **Shy Heathwren** at its nest.



On top of Helena & Aurora Range at sunset  
Photo: Boyd Wykes



Rufous Treecreeper Photo: Boyd Wykes

## Other observations

### Credo Station

At Credo, in mid October, a survey led by Ron and Jan Waterman located two pairs of nesting **Whistling Kites**. One was nesting in the tallest tree close to Rowles Lagoon. An adult was seen perched in the tree with two webbed feet hanging out of its bill and a search at the base of the tree revealed remains of rabbit, yabbie and a goanna. There was also a nesting pair of **Tawny Frogmouth**. The birds on Rowles Lagoon included a **Whiskered Tern**. A telescope is highly recommended to sight all the waterbirds.

### Transline

The Transline sites were surveyed in November by the remote survey team (John Baas, Christine Allbeury, George Shevtsov, Linda Broadhurst, Wayne O'Sullivan and Mark Binns). Sightings included **White-winged** and **Splendid Fairy-wrens**, **Jacky Winter**, **Rainbow Bee-eater**, **Crested Bellbird** and **Redthroat**. **Weebills** and **Inland Thornbills** were common with the occasional sighting of **Chestnut-rumped Thornbill** and **Striated Pardalote**. There were five species of honeyeater, **Red Wattlebird**, **Yellow-throated Miner**, **Singing Honeyeater**, **Yellow-plumed Honeyeater** and **White-fronted Honeyeater**.

### Jilbadji

Terry Powell visited Jilbadji in mid November. Although hot and windy it was a productive trip with groups of **White-fronted Honeyeater**, a **Brown Falcon** feeding a juvenile, two pairs of **Golden Whistler** with juveniles, pair of **Yellow-plumed Honeyeaters** feeding two young in a nest and four **Tawny Frogmouths** flushed from the ground.

### Fraser Range

Sue and Rob Mather surveyed 11 of the sites at Fraser Range when travelling east in mid November and Pauline Woolley six sites on her travels in late November. The greatest number of species was recorded at a woodland site near Newman Rock where one eucalypt species was in full flower. Not surprisingly, **Purple-crowned Lorikeets** were seen there. Otherwise, honeyeaters were most abundant in the shrublands, especially at granite rocks where there was flowering *Kunzea*, *Eremophila* and *Eucalyptus*. Other interesting sightings were **Crested Bellbird**, **Redthroat** and **Dusky Woodswallows** feeding young.



*Kunzea* in flower at Newman Rock  
Photo: Sue Mather

## Karlkurla Bushland Park

The Goldfield Naturalists' Club coordinated a survey at Karlkurla Bushland Park on 11 October 2015. A total of 17 species were recorded at the three fixed sites including **White-fronted** and **White-eared Honeyeaters**, **White-browed Babbler**, **Rainbow Bee-eater**, **Redthroat** and **Grey Shrike-thrush**.

## Surveys in summer 2015-2016

### Jilbadji Nature Reserve

Maris Lauva and Mark Henryon set out to Jilbadji in early December to check out tracks and the area burnt in the recent spring fire. Only one site, JR22, was burnt in the November fire, which 27 days later had mainly insectivores present; **Dusky Woodswallow**, **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike**, **Golden Whistler**, **Rainbow Bee-eater**, **Inland Thornbill** and **Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater**. A camera platform has been set up near the site marker for people to take photos so that the re-growth over the years can be assessed. In all, a total of ten Jilbadji sites were surveyed picking up 49 bird species including **Gilbert's Whistler**, **Rufous Whistler**, **Chestnut Quail-thrush**, **Crested Bellbird**, **Southern Scrub-robin**, **Blue-breasted Fairy-wren**, **Jacky Winter**, **Redthroat**, **Mistletoebird**, **Varied Sittella** and ten honeyeater species.

## Karlkurla Bushland Park

Karlkurla Bushland Park, situated in Kalgoorlie, is surveyed each season. The Goldfields Naturalists' Club organised a 6:30am start on 30 January 2016, which was greatly enjoyed by a group of nine people. The birds were active with 19 species of birds at four sites including **Redthroat**, **Crested Bellbird**, **White-browed Babbler**, **Mistletoebird** and seven species of honeyeater.

### GPS Coordinates available for download

GWW survey site coordinates, for each of the nine survey areas, can be downloaded onto your GPS or into Google Earth as waypoints.

1. Go to the GWW website page <Latest News> <http://www.birdlife.org.au/projects/great-western-woodlands/latest-news-gww>
2. Scroll down page to <Downloads> and right click on [Survey site coordinates for GPS](#) and/or [Survey site coordinates for Google Earth](#). Then click on "Save Link As".

You will now have a .gpx file for your **GPS** and/or .kmz file for **Google Earth**.

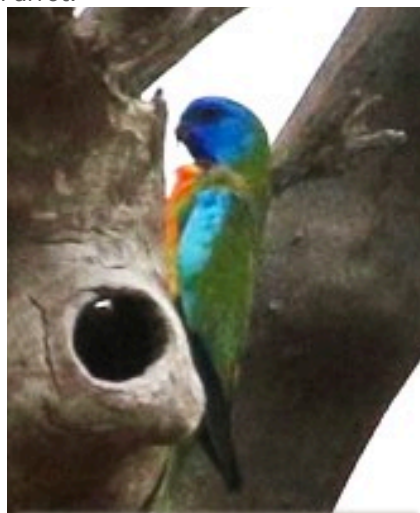
3. Plug in your **GPS** to your computer and upload the .gpx file and/or open **Google Earth** then double click the .kmz file - the survey points will come up on the google map.

## Scarlet-chested Parrot nesting north of the Transline

By George Shevtsov

On 2 November 2015, Linda and I were in mixed eucalypt woodland north of the Transline with Mark Binns and Wayne O'Sullivan, taking part in the GWW remote spring survey. The weather was stormy and raining quite heavily at times. We stopped for lunch and after a rainstorm we all emerged to plan the rest of the day.

I noticed a parrot fly into a tall Salmon Gum, and perch high up at the end of a dead branch. Binoculars revealed the gorgeous blue head and plumage of the male Scarlet-chested Parrot.



Scarlet-chested Parrot – male at nest hollow north of Transline  
Photo: Mark Binns  
(shot taken from a great distance)

After a time it flew off and we tried to track it with no success. However, on returning to the original tree, we saw a bird fly in and perch on the same dead branch - a female Scarlet-chested Parrot.

The bird sat quietly for a while then slowly made its way down to the end of the branch and then disappeared into a hollow below.

Soon after, we noticed the male bird return to the same spot.

On the following morning we set up the scope and focused it on the hollow

and waited. Nothing happened for some time but eventually we saw the male bird fly in and land on the end of the branch and then the female's head emerged from the hollow and the male appeared to feed the female for a short time before she retreated back into the hollow.

This is the second known breeding record for Scarlet-chested Parrot in the GWW. The first was at Mt Manning Range during the first Atlas. Most breeding records for this species have been recorded in the Great Victoria Desert (WA).



Scarlet-chested Parrot – juvenile?, seen later on Holland Track  
Photo: Mark Binns

## Nature of GWW surveys

Bird surveys in the GWW are conducted using the 2ha/20min. methodology, as in the Atlas.

Important to record **the number of birds** you see for each species (not just the species present).

Can also do an area search within 500m of a central point. The first 2ha/20min of an area search can be recorded separately.

# Accessible GWW survey areas when travelling

## By Maris Lauva

Participating in an organised survey in the GWW can be a serious commitment of time and effort. There are, however, some GWW survey sites that can be accessed on a more casual basis to conduct 2ha/20min bird surveys or area searches. Some of these are listed below.

### Fraser Range Station

Fraser Range Station is located on the Eyre Highway, 105km east of Norseman. At least 12 of the Fraser Range survey sites can be easily accessed from the highway, including three sites at Newman Rocks. There is also a survey site near the campgrounds. Fraser Range is one of two survey areas with accommodation and camping facilities and can be an enjoyable stop over for travellers across the Nullarbor.

### Credo Station

Credo Station is 70km north of Coolgardie. Eight of the Credo survey sites can be easily accessed via two maintained gravel roads. They are the Coolgardie North Road (~30km to 120km north of Coolgardie) and Carbine Ora Banda Road. There are also three sites at Rowles Lagoon and one near the homestead. Camping and accommodation facilities are available at Credo Homestead.



Credo Homestead (Dept. Parks and Wildlife)  
Photo: Rod Smith

### Jilbadji Reserve

Jilbadji is situated between the Great Eastern Highway (42km East of Southern Cross) and the Norseman-Hyden Road (80km east of Hyden). Coming from the south, turn off the Norseman-Hyden Road and head north on to Marvel Loch Forrestiana Road. This is a maintained gravel road where six survey sites, within 14km to 54km of the Norseman-Hyden Road, can be surveyed as well as two sites in Lake Cronin Nature Reserve.

### Cave Hill

Further east along the popular Hyden-Norseman Road (gravel road) you can reach part of the Cave Hill survey area. There are two marked sites at McDermid Rock just north of the road. You can also head north on to Victoria Rock Road, the main route for the Cave Hill area, where there are two marked sites within the first 10km, or if you have time to travel further, there are sites at approximately 16km and 30km.

The Hyden-Norseman Road provides plenty of opportunities for some great birding stops along the way and these bird surveys can be added to the GWW data.

**For more detailed information and advice on locations of easily accessible sites, including maps, contact the Surveys Coordinator Maris Lauva.**

**Email:** [gww@birdlife.org.au](mailto:gww@birdlife.org.au) **Mobile:** 0403 029 051.



Surveying at McDermid Rock Photo: Nigel Sutherland

*Every 2ha/20min. survey carried out in the GWW adds valuable information, including those that are opportunistic or casual surveys. When a survey is conducted at a marked GWW survey site they become 'repeat surveys' and can be used in analysis to detect trends in bird numbers. The contribution by individuals travelling through the GWW could be very significant over the course of the next nine years of the project (to 2024).*

### Remember

- Gravel roads in the GWW are often not passable or closed after rain.
- Ensure your vehicle is suitable for the road conditions.

# Species in Focus

## SCARLET-CHESTED PARROT



Male Scarlet-chested Parrot  
Photo: Helga KiesKamp

The Scarlet-chested Parrot (*Neophema splendida*) is a parrot that occurs in the arid and semi-arid areas of southern Australia. A fairly quiet parrot, its calls have been described as: a soft twittering, plaintive piping note when flying or clear whistle *kee-up* and soft harsh *churr-churr* when perched. It is 20-21cm long and about the size of an Elegant Parrot.

The male has a striking blue face and scarlet red breast with yellow belly extending to under the tail. The top of the head, back and tail are grass green. Both the male and female have a black bill. The female differs in having a paler blue face and a green to pink-brown neck and chest. Juveniles are similar to the female, though duller. The colour of the bill is bright orange until 10 weeks old, brown until close to three months, then grey until it reaches maturity and turns black. The Scarlet-chested Parrot also has a blue shoulder and yellow edges to its primary feathers visible in the folded wing, although these are often reduced or absent with wear.



Female Scarlet-chested Parrot  
Photo: Ken Haines

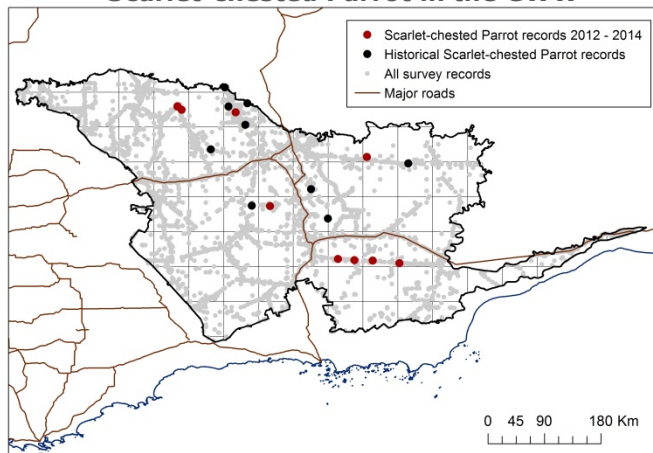
They feed mainly on grass seeds fallen on the ground, though can feed on seeds still held on the plant. Also observed to feed on small shrubs that are fruiting or seeding.

Living in the drier areas of Australia their occurrence and distribution is expected to be reliant on rainfall events and therefore quite changeable and not easily predictable. They occur in woodlands of eucalypt, mulga and sheoak with an understorey of spinifex, other grasses and low shrubs. However, they can also occur in mallee and shrublands, and have been observed in areas regenerating after fire.

Most frequently seen as pairs or small groups, larger groups have been seen in some years of up to 100 birds. Their distribution is from the GWW and Great Victoria Desert in Western Australia, east through South Australia and just inside the border of New South Wales. Historically they have also occurred in the arid parts of the Northern Territory, Queensland and Victoria. Their status is listed as Rare in South Australia, Vulnerable in New South Wales and Victoria, and Secure in Western Australia.

Within the Great Western Woodlands, from 1901 to 2014, there have been 19 records of the Scarlet-chested Parrot and 12 of these were recorded during the project (2012 to 2014). They have been seen in the Dundas, Transline, Cave Hill and Credo survey areas as well as near Kurrajong Rocks (see map below).

### Scarlet-chested Parrot in the GWW



The Scarlet-chested Parrot nests in hollows of trees, from September to December, though can nest at other times when conditions are favourable. The female incubates 3 to 5 eggs for 18 days.

It would be fair to say that the Scarlet-chested Parrot is not often seen and its behaviour not well known in the wild. Those that have seen them in the GWW say that the 'gizz' of this parrot, particularly its behaviour in flight, is unmistakable.

## GWW Committee Notes

### From Alasdair Bulloch

The GWW Committee is now entering its second year in March 2016. All positions are open for nomination and re-election. There are also positions available that have yet to be filled on the GWW Committee (e.g. Communications Officer). Nominations are welcome, however they must be received prior to the March meeting being held on 10 March 2016. Currently members of the GWW Committee include:

Alasdair Bulloch (Chair), John Skillen (Secretary), Maris Lauva (Survey Coordinator), Mark Henryon (Research Officer), Stewart Ford (Research Officer), Laura Howie (Data Manager), Helen Bryant, Liz Fox and Shapelle McNee.

A number of members resigned from their position during 2015. We wish to thank them for their tireless work, passion and enthusiasm. They made a big difference during their term on the GWW Committee. We thank Wayne Monks for his leadership, energy and vision as Chair. Erica Shedley for her insights and support as Research Officer. Alison Goundrey, for her tireless efforts and skills in publicity and promotion. Nola Kunnen for her steadfastness and knowledge during the establishment of the committee. Lou Martini for his advice and support to members of the Finance sub-committee. Libby McGill for her strong commitment (now assisting Maris Lauva to coordinate the bird surveys). Scott McGregor for his support and attending the first meeting.

We also thank; Sandra Maynard assisting with the production of the newsletter, Jean Woodings managing the flowering data, and Libby McGill, Lorraine and Richard Chyne assisting Maris in the coordination of the GWW bird surveys.

## Update on the GWW Project report

Helen Bryant, recently appointed as BirdLife WA Program Manager, is overseeing the finalisation of the GWW Report. Helen provided an update to the GWW Committee in February informing us that all comments from BirdLife Australia and The Nature Conservancy had been received and will be incorporated in to the final report by Liz Fox during March.

The plan, at this stage is to launch the GWW Report in May 2016. The GWW video, now complete, will also be launched at this time and able to be viewed from the GWW website pages. The purpose of the video is to promote the birds of the GWW and the GWW Project, thereby encouraging people to participate or simply keep in touch with how things are going (by signing up for the newsletter).

## Helena and Aurora Range campaign

On Friday, 15 January 2016, Mark and myself met up with The Wilderness Society (TWS), Wildflower Society of WA (WSWA) and Helena and Aurora Range Advocates (HARA) members to join and be part of a cohesive approach to the Helena and Aurora Range campaign. The objectives and core activities to raise public awareness of the mining threat to the range were discussed.

Two campouts are planned at the range in autumn this year, preparations have started for PER submissions (Public Environmental Review, to be released for public comment in June 2016) and Parliament will be petitioned again later this year (to vest Helena and Aurora Range as a National Park). It was agreed that we would meet again in March.

## GWW presentation at BirdLife WA general meeting

The new GWW video will be shown at the May BirdLife WA general meeting followed by a presentation by Alasdair and Shapelle on the GWW and Helena and Aurora Range.

# What's On?

## GWW AUTUMN SURVEY

25 to 31 March or 23 to 29 April 2016

Following the hot summer months, autumn is a great time to be out surveying in the GWW. Two survey dates for autumn are planned, either in late March that includes Easter or in late April that includes Anzac Day. If other dates in autumn suit you better, this is fine too as long as you have at least two vehicles with you on the survey.

## DATES FOR GWW SURVEYS in 2016

The suggested survey dates for 2016 are listed below. Please remember that all dates are flexible. Surveys in winter and summer are also valuable. 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)

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

**Spring 2016:** 24 September – 2 October  
(includes Queen's Birthday weekend)  
15 – 23 October

## PRESENTATION AT BIRDLIFE WA GENERAL MEETING

23 May 2016: GWW and Helena Aurora Campaign

For more information about the project please contact:

**Maris Lauva**

Survey Coordinator

Great Western Woodlands bird surveys

E [gww@birdlife.org.au](mailto:gww@birdlife.org.au)

M 0403 029 051

[www.birdlife.org.au/projects/great-western-woodlands](http://www.birdlife.org.au/projects/great-western-woodlands)



Western Yellow  
Robin

Photo: Boyd Wykes