

Bird Watching in Mt Crosby District

There seems to be a mistaken belief held by many people, including amateur birdwatchers, that you have to travel well beyond your local area, to places such as Lamington, Tamborine, Springbrook or Girraween National Parks, to see a large range of native bird species. While you won't see iconic species such as the Albert's or Superb Lyrebirds in the ridges surrounding the Mt Crosby, you may be pleasantly surprised with what birds do occur in our local area, including the occasional species listed as threatened.

Since I started doing regular bird recording walks in my local area, in the last 20 years or so, I have recorded 143 bird species. This is in the area adjacent to where I live, or within an area that I traverse regularly from the corner of Belah and Wattle Streets to the junction of Swenson's Road with Lake Manchester Road in the Kholo Creek area of Mt Crosby. Surprisingly I hardly ever leave the road during my observations. Admittedly I often recognise some bird species by their calls and don't always see them during some of my traverses. However I have actually seen all of the 143 species at sometime during my observations. Depending on the season, weather conditions and time of day I would sometimes record up to 55 species within an hour or so on one outing particularly when conditions are excellent. On the other hand when conditions are not so good, during cold, windy, overcast weather, I may only record 30 species or rarely less. On average I would record about 45 bird species per 4 kilometre + return walking trip. Because where I walk is only a couple of kilometers or so from the Brisbane River I occasionally see highly mobile bird species, which while following the route of the river often circle away from its course in search of food or preferred water habitat. These species include the Australian Pelican, White-bellied Sea-eagle, Osprey and the Brahminy Kite. Occasionally Wedge-tailed Eagles are seen soaring overhead. Another highly mobile species the Topknot Pigeon is occasionally seen as small flocks flying down off the nearby D'Aguilar Range down to the Brisbane River in search of fruiting trees such as native fig species.

As well as many very common birds that I record I occasionally observe rarely recorded, unexpected species, species that only visit the area very occasionally, or species which are hard to see. Some listed vulnerable, rare or infrequently recorded species include:-

Square-tailed Kite (Vulnerable under the Qld Nature Conservation Act) A few years ago a sub-adult bird spent a few days frequenting an area of bushland near my home. Additionally a pair of birds or an individual is seen occasionally at Mt Crosby or a few kilometres away at Moggill and Bellbowrie. This species has also been observed recently in the Kenmore/Chapel Hill area.

Bush-hen (Shy and generally infrequently seen) Seen only rarely during or after wet weather or heard calling occasionally in rank grass or low dense vegetation adjoining Kholo Creek, beside Swenson's Road, Mt Crosby.

Powerful Owl (Vulnerable under the Qld Nature Conservation Act) As this species is nocturnal it is not recorded during my walks but its distinctive whooo-hooo call is occasionally heard at night emanating from Kholo Creek near my home. Also once seen in my street at night eying off a neighbour's caged parrots, and a juvenile bird I observed once roosting in a gully near my home.

Bush Stone-curlew (Rare under the Qld Nature Conservation Act) Up to four birds are regularly seen roosting together on the ground along my regular traverse and the species eerie call is often heard at night outside my home and in the surrounding area.

Glossy Black-cockatoo (Vulnerable under the Qld Nature Conservation Act) A few years ago three birds were seen flying from Kholo Creek, where they had been observed feeding on the seeds of Casuarinas, via my bush block heading in the direction of the D'Aguilar Range. Three birds were seen regularly in the last 12 months in the Moggill area.

Speckled Warbler (Becoming rare in Brisbane) This ground-nesting species was observed occasionally up until July 2002 near the junction of Swenson's Road with Lake Manchester Road. However the species has not been seen here since road sealing, widening and pipe-laying works were carried out along Lake Manchester Road.

Barred Cuckoo-shrike (Infrequently recorded in Brisbane) Recently a pair was observed in trees along Kholo Creek, beside Swenson's Road, Mt Crosby.

One of the crucial factors that could ensure that these vulnerable, rare or seldom recorded bird species continue to exist in our local area is the retention of native habitat. Here is a brief summary of the habits, habitats, where these species are most likely to be seen and some perceived threats to their survival in our area.

Birds such as the **Square-tailed Kite** and the **Powerful Owl** are highly mobile and require large areas of native forest with large old growth trees in which to breed, feed, range and exist. An extensive bushland area still exists on the nearby D'Aguilar Range, its foothills and surrounding lowlands down to the Brisbane River. However the extent of this bushland is gradually being nibbled away at by rural subdivision, development and the encroachment of exotic weeds. The more this bushland is fragmented and reduced in extent the less chance these species will survive. Thus the less chance we will have of continuing to see these species in our area.

The stealthy, cryptic and often shy **Bush-hen**, with its raucous crowing and shrieking call is more often heard than seen and tends to prefer low dense vegetation, particularly along watercourses and scrub patches. I've seen a small number of Bush-hens killed by cars on Swenson's Road near a creek culvert on my survey route. So please be mindful of wildlife crossing our roads and keep your speed to a minimum when driving through bushland and creek habitat areas.

Bird species such as the **Topknot Pigeon** and the **Barred Cuckoo-shrike** rely very much on fruiting trees such as native figs or Lilly Pillies for their diet. Without substantial numbers of suitable large native fruiting trees over a wide area fruit eating bird species such as these will have to travel much further afield to find sufficient food to survive. Therefore the retention of large figs and patches riparian vegetation and vine scrubs in the local area is very important to them in continuing to be in our area.

Rarely ever seen in large numbers **Glossy Black-cockatoos** have a very specialised diet, feeding entirely on the seeds from the fruiting cones of She-oaks, *Allocasuarina* and *Casuarina* species. Also breeding successes of this species seem to be very few and far between. Their nesting always takes place in a large old growth tree in a hollow at least 20m from the ground. Without sufficient food trees occurring in the vicinity of their large nesting trees these long-lived cockatoos days may be already numbered. Remember that the occasional 2 or 3 Glossy Black-cockatoos seen in our district today may be the same individuals that were seen around the district 30 or more years ago. Therefore even though there is still the odd few around today they may not be on the increase and when the ones that are around now die there may be no more progeny to replace them.

The mostly ground dwelling insectivorous **Speckled Warbler** is very reliant on relatively intact Eucalypt woodland habitat with a mixture of native grass species in the groundlayer interspersed with shrub patches with foliage low to the ground. It nests in clumps of tufted native grasses sometimes tangled with shrubs low to the ground. It flies or hops from branch to branch to feed or moves about at a height rarely above 2 metres. Therefore shrubby woodland with a grassy groundlayer is extremely important to this species existence. Woodland or open forest with a regularly mowed grassy parkland look and no shrubby understorey is completely useless as habitat to the Speckled Warbler.

In concluding I would like to add that bird watching or observing is a very enjoyable and rewarding pastime. Not only is it rewarding to see one of the rare or threatened species that I have mentioned but it is fascinating to observe the behavior and interactions between the more common species in our area. As a therapy for relieving stress and everyday worries I would highly recommend it. If you haven't done it already get yourself a pair of compact, reasonable quality (8 x 40) binoculars, a copy of Slater's, Simpson and Day's or Pizzey and Knights Guide to Australian Birds. Then go for a walk in the fresh country air and visit some bush in your own area and observe the birds. You'll find it extremely rewarding and satisfying. Remember you don't have to travel long distances to somewhere exotic to see a good range of birds. Some of the local places where you can see them are Moggill (State Forest) Forest Reserve; Lake Manchester; BCC Hawkesbury Road Old Quarry Reserve; Gold Creek Reservoir; other parklands along the Brisbane River, or just nearby quiet rural roads, where there is suitable surrounding native habitat or bushland.

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