

# Western Australian Endemics

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Along with the sixteen species described in this class, Western Australia also has a few "almost" endemics. A couple of these bear the name "Western", e.g. Western Yellow Robin, Western Whipbird; but this is misleading, though not as badly as the Western Gerygone which nearly reaches the east coast, denied only by the Great Dividing Range. Others like the Rufous Treecreeper and White-quilled Rock-Pigeon only just cross borders. The White-naped Honeyeater is already separated on the IOC lists into the Gilbert's Honeyeater but has yet to be separated by BirdLife Australia nor, even more importantly, by the Australian taxonomists. The Blue-breasted Fairy-wren is another that falls into the "almost" category but there are two other disjunct populations – one which scarcely crosses the South Australian border and the other on the western side of the Eyre Peninsula.

## **Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo *Calyptorhynchus banksia naso***

Strictly speaking as a genus this bird cannot be seen as endemic; three of the five subspecies are found in Western Australia, but only the south-west race *naso* is unique to WA. I have taken the liberty of including it in this class because it is unique in its habitat choice and must by now be considered endangered with its total numbers in the region of 10,000 - 12,000, according to Dr Ron Johnstone of the WA museum. Along with *samueli* it has a smaller body and crest than the other forms. However *naso* has a larger and more bulbous bill than *samueli*, comparable in size to the much larger *macrorhynchus*. In recent years has been seen more frequently on the Swan Coastal Plain because it has developed a taste for the fruit of the Cape Lilac. Nests in living trees more often than the other races.

## **Baudin's Black-Cockatoo *Calyptorhynchus baudinii***

This is the long-billed race of the White-tailed cockatoos. It is very similar to the short-billed in size, shape and plumage but is distinguished by the diagnostic bill shape and also differs in calls, habitat and feeding behaviour. Feeds mainly on Marri, where they can extract the seeds with very little damage to the rim of the nut because of their longer and finer upper mandible. Calls are similar but that of the subject bird is more clipped and has a little less of the wailing note of Carnaby's. Takes Marri seeds, strips bark and dead wood from Marri and Jarrah in search of insect larvae; feeds on the ground on *Erodium* (wild geranium) or fallen fruits and also takes fruit from orchards, splitting apples and pears to eat the seeds. Generally in smaller flocks or groups than Carnaby's – sometimes flies with them.

## **Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo *Calyptorhynchus latirostris***

Regarded as vulnerable but in larger numbers than the long-billed. Are widespread in south-west Western Australia, although numbers have declined their range is still considered to be much the same as it was when European settlement began. Regarded as partly migratory and partly resident. Resident in higher rainfall areas where much native vegetation remains; breeding migrant in drier parts of range and at sites where most native vegetation has been cleared. Feeds on seeds from eucalypts, introduced pines and wild

geranium; occasionally nectar, flowers and insect larvae. Seen to move along branches biting off cones and chewing green twigs for no apparent reason. Monogamous - usually pair for life and remain together year round. Sometimes seen in flocks of several hundred.

### **Western Corella (*Cacatua pastinator*)**

The specific name *pastinator* means trench-digger from '*pastinum*', a 2 pronged fork used in agriculture. Larger than the other corellas with broad rounded wings and a shortish tail. The nominate race previously extended from Albany to Perth, but is now largely confined to the Lake Muir region and is called Muir's Corella by some authorities. There is a subspecies *derbyi* found in the north and central Wheatbelt. Strongly gregarious, especially when foraging; seen in pairs, small flocks and flocks numbering hundreds. Sound like the other corellas i.e. noisy and raucous. Walk with an awkward waddling gait, may be not quite as badly as other corellas. Long regarded as pests in cereal crops and often shot or poisoned.

### **Western Rosella *Platycercus icterotis***

The smallest of the rosellas and the only one in the south-west. Two subspecies: nominate *icterotis* and subspecies *xanthogenys*. Differences - striking yellow cheek on *icterotis* is slightly smaller and much paler, cream on *xanthogenys*; saddle and tertials, black with broad green scalloping (nominate), in *xanthogenys* saddle redder with red not green scalloping. Uppertail dark green centrally, rest dark green or blue-green basally, against mostly dark blue not green. Usually seen in pairs or family parties, occasionally in small flocks in winter. Inhabit open eucalypt forest and woodlands; arboreal and terrestrial. Tame but generally rather quiet and unobtrusive. Rather buoyant flight in contrast to the larger rosellas with their stronger and heavier undulating flying. Pleasant melodious contact call. Habitat is confined to high rainfall areas, usually forests and woodlands; subspecies usually in low rainfall eucalypt woodlands with heath understorey. Appear to be sedentary throughout most of range. Feeds mainly on grasses and herbaceous plants, also fruits, flowers, insects and their larvae. Mainly feed on ground.

### **Red-capped Parrot *Purpureicephalus spurius***

Medium sized parrot, very similar in size to the Australian Ringneck. Has distinctive elongated mandible. Unmistakable and adults rather gaudy. Adults differ slightly but often inseparable; best distinguished by pattern of underwing - most females (70%) have prominent narrow white bar through centre of outer secondaries and inner primaries (never in adult male), some have longer bar, a few have none. Slightly duller in plumage and red of underbody less uniform. From front head looks narrower and more rounded - broader and flatter in male. Juveniles much paler and plainer, hence specific name *spurius*, from the Latin - illegitimate. Found only in the south-west, mostly south and west of a line joining Esperance, Pingrup, Northam and Gingin. Sometimes recorded outside this area. Some contraction of range since 19703, mainly through habitat modification. A few areas locally extinct and declining in some others - but also expanding in a few. Regarded as a pest in fruit growing areas and large numbers shot since the region was settled. In flight display a yellowish-green rump unique from any other parrot.

### **Western Ground Parrot *Pezoporus flaviventris***

Apart from the recently re-discovered Night Parrot, probably the most endangered Australian parrot along with the Orange-bellied Parrot. Only separated from the nominate race *wallicus* and given species status quite recently. Found in floristically diverse

heathland in diverse areas, drier than the eastern species, although historical distribution included wetter areas. Nests on the ground in dry heathland and feeds mainly on the ground among dense vegetation. Range has contracted markedly and is now largely confined to the Mount Arid area. The population is probably just over 100 - 140 birds and fire could easily destroy the birds still surviving. The chance of this happening is quite high so the prognosis for this elegant little bird must be regarded as grim.

### **Noisy Scrub-bird *Atrichornis clamosus***

Two species in genus both small to medium sized, brown and rather nondescript. Widely accepted that most closely related to the lyrebirds. Both rare, localised and secretive; both primarily terrestrial, foraging on ground, roosting and nesting close to ground. Both are weak fliers. Sedentary, adults rarely disperse far from natal territory and are extremely reluctant to cross areas of open habitat. Hence they are vulnerable to habitat fragmentation and fires. Generally seen as a brown flash when they cross a road or track. Both the English and specific names of this bird mirror its powerful cries (Latin *clamosus* from *clamare* - to shout). Easy to hear, hard to see. Occupy an area centred on Two Peoples Bay, found at Cheynes Beach and adjacent areas. Status has been reclassified from endangered to vulnerable but this may be difficult to maintain - any natural disaster could see them vanish from an area.

### **Red-winged Fairywren *Malurus elegans***

Belonging to a family of small to medium small passerines, endemic to Australia and New Guinea. Two subfamilies recognised: the *malurinae* - fairy-wrens with 17 species (9 in Australia) and the *amytonithinae* - the grasswrens with 10 species confined to mainland Australia. Western Australia has seven fairy-wrens - five of them in the south-west; but not all confined to the south-west. The Red-winged Fairy-wren is the largest and longest tailed of the chestnut-shouldered fairywrens. Plumage is very similar to that of the Blue-breasted Fairy-wren. The adult breeding male has a diagnostic combination of pale silvery-blue cap, ear tufts, mantle and upper-back and blue-black from chin to breast. Adult non-breeding male, mostly grey-brown above with distinctive rufous suffusion to scapular, black bill and lores; adult female similar but with red-brown lores but no red-brown eye-ring. Mainly occurs in forests of Jarrah, Karri and Marri, inhabiting dense understory especially round streams and swamps. Confined to the south-west, mostly within 50km of the coast; widespread, but patchily distributed. Adversely affected by drainage of swamps and clearing of swamp vegetation for agriculture and human settlement.

### **Black Grasswren *Amytornis housei***

Second largest grasswren – robust with a full rounded tail, seldom held cocked like other grasswrens. Sexes differ in colour and pattern or underbody in all plumages. Adult male distinctive, mostly black with contrasting rich rufous-brown upperbody and bold white streaks to head, neck, saddle and breast. Female similar but underbody rich rufous-brown and coarse black-edged white streaking restricted to chin, throat and upper breast. Juveniles and immatures like female but duller. Occupy gullies, gorges, rocky ravines, hillsides, sandstone outcrops, escarpments and tumbled boulder fields, usually with sparse covering of trees, spinifex, and some shrubs. Confined to central north Kimberley. Major threat is undoubtedly too frequent fires. Relations within family groups and voice poorly known and there is little information about young. Builds a large, bulky globular or dome-shaped structure; clutch size is one or two, mainly two.

## **Western Bristlebird *Dasyornis longirostris***

One of three birds bearing the name *dasyornis* which literally means 'hairy bird'. The Rufous Bristlebird, now found along the south Victorian coast, once had a subspecies *litoralis* between Cape Mentelle - Margaret River and Cape Naturaliste but this subspecies is now considered extinct. The Western Bristlebird is the smallest of the three, and used to be called the Long-billed Bristlebird because its biller is longer and more slender. Mostly confined to the area between Two Peoples Bay and Waychincup Inlet; and in Fitzgerald River National Park between Gairdner Road and East Mount Barren. Status is vulnerable, possibly endangered. Population may be round 2000 breeding birds (2000). Vulnerable to habitat destruction or modification - fire remains the major threat. Burning needs to be of a mosaic pattern to enable birds to move into unburned areas.

## **Dusky Gerygone *Gerygone tenebrosa***

Scattered thinly from the Gascoyne region, north through the Pilbara and into the south-west Kimberley. A few reports further east but not confirmable. Similar to the Mangrove, Western and Large-billed Gerygones - but much longer billed than the first two, and much finer than the third. The adult has a diagnostic pale eye, facial pattern of dusky loreal stripe and a broken white eye-ring. Otherwise rather nondescript. Restricted to mangroves with a much quieter and more repetitive song than the richer songs of the Mangrove, Western and White-throated Gerygones. Usually seen singly, though sometimes form loose feeding groups of four or five. Forage quietly but energetically among flowers and foliage of mangroves, mainly in outer canopy, but occasionally below the canopy on trunks, branches and aerial roots.

## **Western Thornbill *Acanthiza inornata***

Small, drab thornbill with a shortish tail, pale iris; but in the adult fine, pale scalloping on forehead and mottling on ear coverts. Sexes alike. Unlikely to mistake for any other thornbill, its very plainness identifies it. Mainly in eucalypt woodlands, confined to the south-west. Known to decline rapidly in remnant patches if understory of shrubs and ground litter is disturbed. Regularly recorded in Kings Park until 1986, seldom reported since then. Generally regarded as sedentary. Feed terrestrially and arboreal. Forage on ground, in low shrubs and in trees. Mainly insectivorous, but known to take nectar. Usually seen in twos, probably pairs, and small groups of 3 - 5.

## **Western Wattlebird *Anthochaera lunulata***

The generic name of the wattlebirds is a combination of two words: *anthos* a flower and *khairo* to enjoy; the specific name *lunulatus* means crescent-shaped. Can be mistaken for the Red Wattlebird, but not if seen well. It is much smaller and slimmer; has a longer and finer bill and lacks wattles. Darker above, more coarsely streaked and spotted; lacks the yellow belly, and the silvery cheek patches extend down the neck. Mainly found in sub coastal and coastal open forests and woodlands in the temperate south-west. Considered to be resident but some local movement; especially common on south-west coast in summer. Sings better than the Red Wattlebird and its voice is entirely dissimilar, and still more striking "than the Little Wattlebird" (according to Ashby and Le Souef, 1928).

## **Kimberley Honeyeater *Meliphaga fordiana***

Formerly regarded as a subspecies of the White-lined Honeyeater; separated into a separate species by Christidis and Boles (2008). However their reasons for this in

*Systematics and Taxonomy of Australian Birds* rather cryptically said "The forms of *Meliphaga albilineata* and *Meliphaga fordiana* in the Northern Territory and the Kimberley region differed at levels commensurate with species recognition for each". Pizzey and Knight revised edition (2007) said simply - "very similar to White-lined Honeyeater - genetic distance indicates species level distinction". Apparent differences are very minor: the Northern Territory bird is greener on the wings, less white on the belly. Evidence suggests long period of separation has produced the differences necessary for separation and this is normal if not always obvious.

### **Western Spinebill *Acanthorhynchus superciliosus***

Distinctive and lovely small honeyeater with long, slender, decurved bill. Tail looks cleft at rest, but square cut at tip in flight. Sexes very different as adults, but alike as juveniles and very drab. Found as far east as Israelite Bay west to coast, then north to Eneabba; rarely further north but records at Norseman and Kalbarri (Australian Atlas). Formerly described as irruptive but now regarded as local gatherings; seem to be resident in many places, but some movements in others. The female does most of the nest building and incubates alone, while male advertises territory. Territories seem to be tiny - from 0.2 to 0.5 hectares. Where there is conflict over feeding and drinking rights in dry periods Spinebills generally lose. When advertising territory males sometimes rise in vertical flight to about 10 metres above the canopy; before reaching apex gives a typical call which continues to apex and short distance in fall. Upon landing bird usually attacked by other males, suggesting call was directed at them (Immelman, 1960 - 1961). Flight can be noisy.

### **Gilbert's Honeyeater *Melithreptus chloropsis***

Recently separated from the White-naped Honeyeater by the IOC. The eastern bird is found from Queensland to eastern South Australia and differs from Gilbert's by having red above the eye not white. Found mainly in open forest dominated by Jarrah, Marri or Karri in ranges, Wandoo and Tuart in other areas. There has been decline in numbers since the early 60s in the wheatbelt and on the swan coastal plain; where it is now seldom seen. According to the latest studies, even though the bird was separated from the White-naped Honeyeater, it is more closely related to the Tasmanian Black-headed Honeyeater.

### **White-breasted Robin *Eopsaltria georgiana***

Generic name *Eopsaltria* - dawn harpist from *eos* dawn and *psaltria*, a female harpist; *georgiana* from King George Sound. Medium-sized robin - grey and white with a short, slender bill, broad wings with rounded tips, and a moderately long tail. Built like Western Yellow Robin but slightly smaller. Males are heavier than females, outweighing them by about 4 grams. Found in two different habitats: southern group occupies diverse understorey of wet sclerophyll forests dominated by Karri and dense vegetation along creeks and gullies in Jarrah forest and the northern population in dense coastal scrubs of paperbarks and acacias. Separated by unsuitable banksia-heath woodland on the Swan Coastal Plain. Require dense, moist vegetation with a lot of ground litter. Sometimes forage in burnt areas. Generally seen in ones or twos, but also in small family parties. Quiet and unobtrusive, can be confiding, but often shy on initial contact. Sit still for long periods before pouncing on prey. Rarely sally after flying insects. Flight noisy, but glides into land.

### **Red-eared Firetail *Stagonopleura oculata***

*Stagonopleura* = 'spotty flanks with conspicuous eyes'; *oculatus* - with eyes, only this time spots on belly. However, according to some authors is from the French *Senegale ocula*

given by Quoy and Gaimard (1830) reference to conspicuous red ear-patch. Rather solitary, less gregarious than other Australian finches. Usually in pairs or small flocks of up to ten. Quiet, shy and inconspicuous. Usually forage close to, or on ground among or close to dense vegetation. Very agile and quick in movement; when flushed flying silently and directly to cover, revealing red rump. Little undulation common in other finches. Most commonly heard - a mournful, ascending whistle. Inhabits dense riparian vegetation within eucalypt forests but also paperbark swamps and dam heathlands. Adversely affected by clearing of Jarrah forests. Residents or local movements.

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