

# Woodlands on the Wing

Issue 8 Autumn 2014

*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



Splendid Fairy-wren  
Photo: Georgine Steytler

Seven of the nine survey areas in the Great Western Woodlands were surveyed this autumn. Easter was almost a 'heat wave' with days of 35°C, then a week later on Anzac weekend the dry season broke with 30-50 mm rain in many areas, meaning wet muddy times for teams surveying Helena and Aurora Range and the Transline.

Conditions were dry for the Fraser Range area surveyed in early April, with plenty of birds recorded. A team of people surveyed the Cave Hill area following the Credo campout and a good portion of Jilbadji Nature Reserve was surveyed just before the rains came. Karlkurla Park in Kalgoorlie will be surveyed on the last day of autumn by the Goldfield Naturalists' Club, Kalgoorlie-Boulder Urban Landcare Group and the BirdLife WA Excursions Committee. Likely as a result of the rain some early breeding activity was recorded at Credo and along the Transline.

## Caught in the mud

### Trip Report by Libby McGill

Warm weather, lovely still days, freezing weather, wind and torrential rain! We had it all on our recent survey to Helena and Aurora Range. The group consisted of Dianne, Chris, Stella and Libby in two vehicles and an off-road camper trailer. We spent two nights at our first campsite, which we dubbed the Iron Roof Hotel. Surveying six fixed sites and a few extras, we found **Gilbert's Whistler** plus all the usual expected birds like **Weebill**, **White-eared Honeyeater** (plentiful), **Striated Pardalote** and plenty of **Rufous Treecreepers** calling around the campsite. An **Australian Hobby** entertained us for a while perched on a branch right above us.



Chris, Dianne and Libby at Helena & Aurora Range  
Photo: Stella Stewart-Wynne

The surrounding countryside was slightly damp with no dust – rain must have fallen a few days before our visit. Moving on to Pittosporum Rock campsite we found **Inland Thornbill**, **Chestnut-rumped Thornbill**, **Southern Whiteface** as well as plenty of **Red Wattlebirds**. Parrots and raptors seemed to be scarce though we did tick **Wedge-tailed Eagle** and **Brown Falcon** as well as an **Australian Hobby**. A **Southern Boobook** and an **Australian Owlet-nightjar** called occasionally during the night. A **Chestnut Quail-thrush** caused some excitement.

Rain fell during the night causing problems for the tent camper without a flysheet. The contents of a 20L water container was lost when the soft ground caused the stool on which it stood to tip over. The following night more rain fell and at one stage a cloudburst produced a very heavy deluge. Another crash and gushing of water woke everyone – the camper trailer's awning had split under the weight of water and some of the aluminium poles broken or bent. A temporary tarp in lieu of a flysheet seemed to have kept the tent fairly dry.

Next morning the rock hole was overflowing and filled with croaking frogs that seemed to appear from nowhere. The road was covered in pools so we spent a third night here to let the track dry out a bit.

On leaving the next morning we had to stop about every kilometre to find and bush bash our way around large pools on the track, which was tiresome and time-consuming. After 14km the Toyota and trailer became firmly bogged in what had looked a reasonable part of the track.

Five hours of intense labour digging in the red, glutinous 45cm deep mud and fetching branches to push under the wheels eventually saw the vehicles freed. We camped beside the vehicles due to the lateness of the hour.



Next morning was a repeat of the previous day's detouring around pools and mud, and once more the Toyota and trailer became mired, even more deeply. After more fruitless digging a sat phone call to Shapelle resulted early the following morning in an Emergency Response Team from Carina Mine (Polaris Metals Pty Ltd) arriving with two vehicles and four men. It took two tries before freeing the Toyota and trailer, then we were escorted south around and through many more bog holes then through the mine property and eventually onto the highway.

Certainly, a trip to remember. My only regret was that we were unable to complete all of our bird survey sites on our way southwards!

## What's worse – Mud or Dust?

### Trip Report by Jan Waterman

After three nights and two days of rain and drizzle, mud is not fun when you are bird surveying on the Transline. What's more the birds are not so prevalent around dams as water is pooling elsewhere. There were only three dams in the 40 sites that we surveyed but that's where we have previously seen the more interesting species.

The Woodlands were in good shape as rain has fallen over the last three or four months according to the Pet Meat Butcher in Kalgoorlie. Among other things he sells minced Camel which is probably good news for the Woodlands as fresh Camel tracks were seen in the mud at a couple of survey sites.

White, yellow and cream mallees were flowering along with eremophilas, wattles, and several small wildflowers. Many butterflies, moths, grasshoppers and flying ants were prevalent. We discovered that the juvenile **Pied Butcherbird** has a trendy, beige bib. A juvenile honeyeater we saw also had a grey / beige "bib" but because of its white and grey markings we were unable to pair it to a parent beyond reasonable doubt. Many sites we surveyed did not have a large number of species, however, some of the birds noted were in good numbers within the 2ha sites, with many raising young.

Mistletoe was flowering and the **Mistletoebirds** at the Cardunia Dam were a delight as were the several colonies of **White-browed Babblers**. Cardunia Dam is an excellent camping spot except when there is a frost. Currently the dams are very full. Carol Trethowan saw **Emus** and small wallabies at the rock.

The Cardunia Dam is a few kilometres off the Trans Access Road and was the site for a quarry used to provide ballast for the first railway line. North-east of the large granite outcrop are extensive woodlands accessible only by foot. That's another whole expedition.

Trains were frequent and we estimated we lost a good 10 minutes of bird calls after a train had come and gone. The Westrail camp at Xanthus took pity on us when they saw our mud infested clothes and offered us a hot shower. I think they saved a marriage! A **Brown Falcon** used the huge tower as his lookout and obligingly flew circles for us while thornbills twittered in and out of the Pepper Trees. The "boss" asked us if we were going on to Naretha to see the rare Naretha Parrot. Investigation has led us to think it is a Blue Bonnet! A visit to Naretha to try and view this parrot is now on our bucket list.

So some advice to future surveyors, try to avoid the Nullarbor Muster long weekend. Several hundred people were sharing the Transline Access Road with us. The



Red-capped Robin  
Photo: Ron Waterman

road held up well for the most part but we did see some speedsters slide on a few occasions. We did a 'Pride of Erin' at the flood way along with many others. Apparently the muster is always around Easter so best to find out the date and avoid the traffic. Since we did the previous survey 18 months ago a mine has commenced along the Balladonia / Xanthus road and trucks and vehicles are apparently frequent. Our plan to camp on that road was discouraged which is why we stayed at Xanthus.

We can recommend the experience whether in dust or mud and suggest you allow a few extra days, as this is a beautiful and remote area of the Great Western Woodland.



Cardunia Dam  
Photo: Carol Trethowan



# Karlkurla Bushland Park in Kalgoorlie-Boulder

**Karlkurla** is pronounced **gull-gur-la** and is the local Aboriginal name for the Silky Pear, a climber with a large green pear shaped fruit full of silky haired seeds. Kalgoorlie derives its name from the Karlkurla.

In Kalgoorlie-Boulder, the Goldfields Naturalists' Club and Kalgoorlie-Boulder Urban Landcare Group (KBULG) have been conducting bird surveys at Karlkurla Bushland Park for the GWW Project since 2012.

Karlkurla Bushland Park, located on the northern edge of Kalgoorlie-Boulder, 5 minutes drive from the centre of Kalgoorlie, includes 200 ha of regenerated bushland since being felled over 100 years ago by wood-cutters to fuel the wood-fired steam engines, create the wood lines and support the underground mines. KBULG cares and maintains the park on behalf of the City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder.



Silky Pear  
*Marsdenia australis*  
Photos: Kim Eckert

## Surveys in Karlkurla Park

### Report by Janette Kavanagh

We are now well into our second year of bird surveys in Karlkurla Bushland Park as part of the Great Western Woodlands Project. Karlkurla Park is an area of regenerated bushland located on the northern outskirts of the town and easily accessible. The park has an extensive, clearly marked and sealed network of paths and strategically positioned benches and tables. Local residents who are interested in birds are able to participate in the surveys without having to travel out of town. As a result we have had a good mixture of participants including children; and all have enjoyed getting out and learning more about our local birdlife.

We have identified three 2ha sites within the 200ha park and each site has a slightly different habitat. Site 1 is mostly Salmon Gum with an understorey of wattles, eremophilas and saltbush. It also includes a small creek although we haven't seen it flowing yet. Site 2 has a gentle slope with different eucalypts and understorey. Site 3 includes a rocky ridge. The park is an excellent representation of the local Goldfields woodland.

In order to complete the surveys on all three sites within a reasonable time, we split into two groups. Once Site 1 is completed by all participants, we then split up and head off to Site 2 and Site 3 separately. We all meet back at the KBULG office & native plant nursery, which is also in the Park, to enjoy morning tea and compare notes.



Karlkurla Bushland Park site 2  
Photo: Janette Kavanagh

So far we have had between 10 and 18 participants including children as young as 18 months! All have been interested to see what birds are in the Park and to find out "what bird makes that call?" It is especially nice when someone gets to identify birds that they have been watching in their own backyards.

Our summer survey was held last February and was surprisingly overcast, cool and with a little drizzle so we did not expect to see many birds. Surprisingly, there was a good range of species recorded including the **Weebill, Australian Magpies, Red Wattlebird, White-fronted Honeyeater, White-eared Honeyeater, Yellow-plumed Honeyeater, Brown Honeyeater, Mistletoebird** and **Redthroat**. Of course some birds chose to appear outside our survey areas including **White-winged Fairy-wren, Striated Pardalote, White-browed Babbler, Rainbow Bee-eater**, and a **Pied Butcherbird**.



Photo: Janette Kavanagh

It is a delight to spend time out in the bush and to meet like-minded people. Other park users, exercising or walking the dog, sometimes stop and talk and ask about our bird watching. Just another way of raising awareness of our fantastic woodland environment – we are not living in the desert!

# Remote surveys in the GWW

Prior to the GWW project starting in 2012, about 5,000 ad hoc surveys had been conducted within the region. These surveys were from the first and second Bird Atlases, excursions, personal birdwatching, museum records and environmental surveys for mining and development. Many of these surveys were limited to the more accessible western half of the region and along the main highways.

As a result of the GWW project we have conducted an additional 2,000 surveys right across the GWW that have helped to fill in many of the gaps. Some surveys were done in places over 50km from the nearest previous record!

However, as you can see from the map below there are still some areas that have had less than 5 surveys in a 20 minute grid cell. This is particularly the case in the south-eastern section of the GWW. The reason for this is the lack of access tracks in the area, although there are some old station tracks as well as some newer looking tracks evident on aerial photography.

If you happen to be visiting any of these areas please conduct some extra bird surveys for us. We are also looking for some remote area enthusiasts who are keen to visit the south-east of the GWW and find accessible tracks for us. Or if you already have knowledge of that area please get in touch!

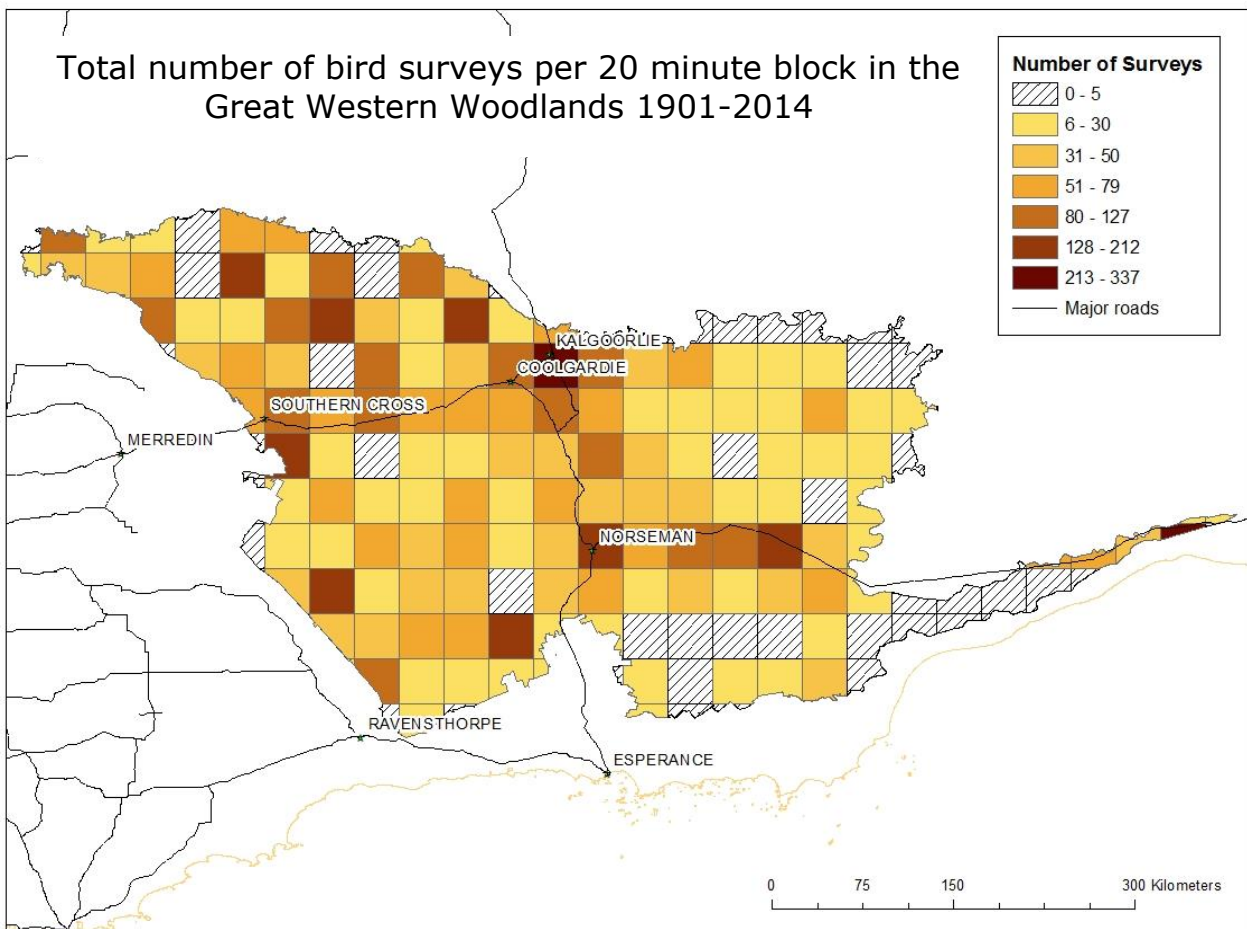
## GWW Project Gets Another Season

We are pleased to announce that a six-month extension for the GWW Project has been approved. This means that we are now able to include the spring 2014 survey results into the final report that will be produced for the current project, to be released in May 2015.

Liz and Shapelle will remain in their current roles until the end of May 2015, in particular assisting the newly formed GWW Committee as they ease into their roles of ensuring that the seasonal bird surveys in the GWW continue until at least 2024!

## GWW Committee

The GWW Project now has a **GWW Committee** (officially, the BirdLife WA **Birds of the Great Western Woodlands Committee**). The GWW Committee consists of 12 members and includes eight official positions and a funding sub-committee. The GWW Committee will 'learn the ropes' this year and coordinate its first GWW survey in Autumn 2015. We will introduce the committee members in the winter issue of *Woodlands on the Wing*.





# Species in Focus

## PURPLE-CROWNED LORIKEET



The Purple-crowned Lorikeet is a small lorikeet (15-17 cm long) that inhabits the mallee and woodlands of southern Australia. The body and wings of these lorikeets are various shades of greens and blues with a touch of yellow and bronze. Their heads have bright colours including a purple crown, bright orange forehead, a red patch in front of the eye and a small orange patch over the ear (ear coverts). The males have red patches under the wing. Immature birds are paler and do not have the purple crown until mature. Despite their bright colours they can be surprisingly difficult to spot amongst the leaves at the top of a gum tree!

Its scientific name is *Glossopsitta porphyrocephala*. The species name *porphyrocephala* refers to its purple crown (Greek; *porphurous* purple and *kephale* head). There are two other *Glossopsitta* species in Australia, the Musk Lorikeet and Little Lorikeet. Neither occurs in Western Australia. The genus *Glossopsitta* is endemic to Australia.

Purple-crowned Lorikeets can be heard and seen in small to large groups feeding on flowers in the canopies of eucalypt mallees and trees. Their distribution is along the length of mainland southern Australia, from the south west of Western Australia to East Gippsland in Victoria, as well as on Kangaroo Island. However, their distribution on the mainland is not continuous with a gap across the Nullarbor. Based on Atlas records, this gap is widest during the spring and summer months. In New South Wales (NSW), the Purple-crowned Lorikeet is uncommon, estimated to consist of less than 10% of the total population for this species.

The Purple-crowned Lorikeet is usually found in dry sclerophyll forests (10-30 m high eucalypt trees), woodlands

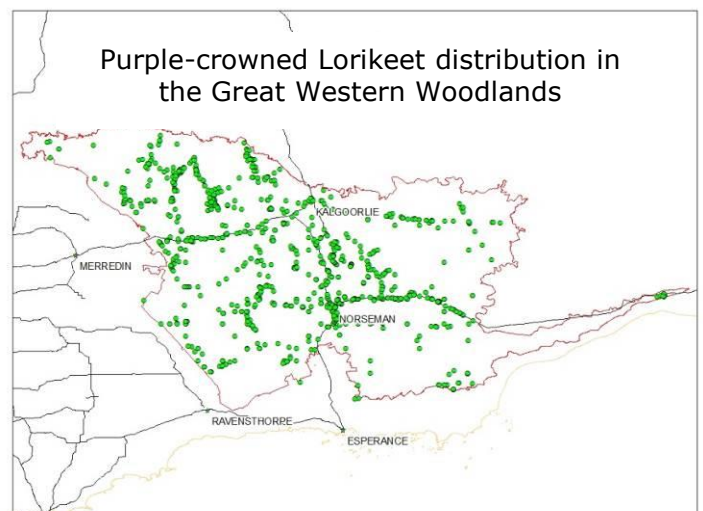
and mallees, which may explain, in part, its absence in Tasmania. Sclerophyll simply refers to the hard leaves of plants that prevent wilting (as well as grazing). A feature that is common to most plants in the mallee and woodlands of the Great Western Woodlands. The hard leaves are considered to be an adaptation to a seasonal rainfall, (times of dry conditions) and low phosphorous in the soil, a situation that occurs throughout much of Australia.

In NSW the Purple-crowned Lorikeet is listed as Vulnerable and is included in their *Saving our Species* program. The main threat to this species in NSW and across its entire distribution is clearing of woodland habitat, such that their food sources of flowering eucalypts are lost as well as sources of hollows for nesting. Introduced species may also have an impact on the Purple-crowned Lorikeet where they utilise the same food sources and potential nest hollows and include the honeybee and the Rainbow Lorikeet (in Perth).

The Purple-crowned Lorikeet feeds predominantly on the nectar and pollen of eucalypt flowers, although has been recorded feeding on melaleuca flowers, fruits and insects. Their movements have been described as nomadic and as a response to the availability of eucalypt blossom.

During August to December the Purple-crowned Lorikeet nests in hollows of eucalypt trees, at some distance (several km) from their feeding areas.

The distribution of the Purple-crowned Lorikeet in the Great Western Woodlands is extensive, occurring throughout the whole area. However their presence can vary significantly from season to season – sometimes entirely absent from the GWW and sometimes present and breeding in large numbers. All based on the presence of flowering eucalypts.





## Wedge-tailed Eagle nests and pellets in the GWW

### Request for pellets

While conducting surveys in the Great Western Woodlands have you come across Wedge-tailed Eagle nests (often in the tops of the tallest trees)?

Russell Palmer is collecting data on the diet of Wedge-tailed Eagles (part of a predator diet study) and needs to increase his sample size of Wedge-tailed Eagle pellets (regurgitated feathers, hair and bones) from the Great Western Woodlands. So far Russell only has a small number of pellets, which contained rabbit, dingo, sheep and euro as prey. Other predators included in the study are dingoes, foxes, feral cats and perentie.

Any pellets people may find while conducting bird surveys would be greatly appreciated. The best places to reliably collect pellets are from below favourite perch sites, within 50m of nest sites.



Simon Cherriman says that the pellets can vary in size from half the pellet length shown in the photo above, to greater than the pen length! Collecting bags can be provided.

For further information or to pass on information and collected pellets please contact

Shapelle McNee, email: [gww@birdlife.org.au](mailto:gww@birdlife.org.au), mobile: 0439 668 693 OR

Russell Palmer, email: [Russell.Palmer@dpaw.wa.gov.au](mailto:Russell.Palmer@dpaw.wa.gov.au)

# What's On?

## UPCOMING SURVEYS

With the extension of the GWW Project for a further six months (to the end of May 2015) we have now booked in dates for a Summer 2014/15 survey. The summer survey will be followed by an autumn and spring survey in 2015.

The next survey in the Great Western Woodlands is the winter 2014 survey.

### GWW WINTER SURVEY

12-18 July 2014

Would you like to visit the Great Western Woodlands this winter? Suggested dates are over the long weekend from 12 – 18 July 2014 (although survey dates are flexible). Four survey areas, Cave Hill, Frank Hann/Peak Charles, Transline and Karroun Hill have yet to be surveyed in winter so we are particularly looking for people for these areas. Two areas have accommodation with hot showers (Fraser Range and Credo) to help keep out the winter chill!

### FUTURE SURVEY DATES

If you would like to take part in a future trip to the GWW, the suggested survey dates for 2014 and 2015 are shown below. Please remember that all dates are flexible and surveys at any time are appreciated. If you are keen to become involved either as a group leader or a participant, please contact Shapelle to lock in your preferences and to receive copies of the relevant information.

Winter 2014: 12–18 July

Spring 2014: 27 September–3 October

Summer 2014: 6–12 December

Autumn 2015: 3–9 April including Easter weekend OR  
24–30 April including Anzac weekend

Spring 2015: 26 September–2 October including Queens Birthday weekend

For more information about the project please contact:

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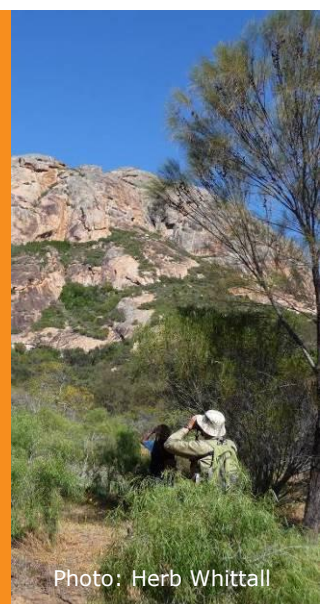


Photo: Herb Whittall