



SAVING OUR SPECIES

# Saving our threatened woodland birds



[environment.nsw.gov.au/sos](https://environment.nsw.gov.au/sos)

## Woodlands

Woodlands are vegetation communities with widely spaced trees and a relatively open canopy. They cover a large part of New South Wales from the coast, tablelands, alps and inland slopes to the semi-arid and arid inland. Many woodlands are made up mostly of eucalypts such as gums, boxes and ironbarks. In others the dominant trees are wattles such as mulga, boree and brigalow. A diverse and healthy woodland can have hundreds of species of trees, shrubs, grasses and groundcover wildflowers. Woodland communities are also home to countless invertebrates, frogs, reptiles, birds, bats, possums, gliders and other mammals that all play a role in a fully-functioning woodland ecosystem. Many woodlands, particularly in the NSW 'Sheep-Wheat Belt' on the inland slopes and plains, are now rare or threatened. Many have been cleared by more than 90% across their range, so many woodland plants and animals are now rare or threatened. Fire, weeds, tree dieback, feral predators and overabundant native animals are some of the threats to the health of our remaining woodlands.

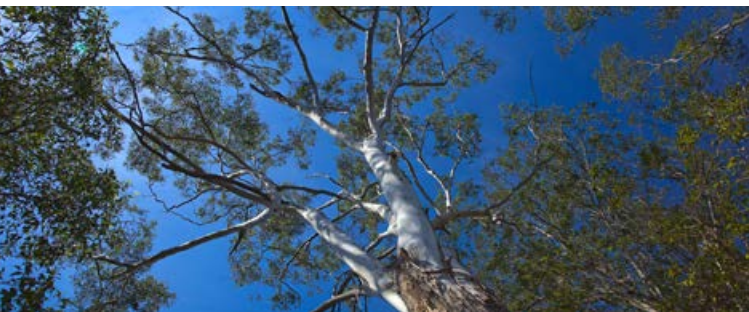
## Woodland birds

The woodlands of New South Wales are home to more than 250 species of birds, some of which are woodland specialists. Nearly half of these species have declined in numbers in the last few decades or are listed as threatened under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*, which means they are at risk of extinction in the near future if we don't help to protect their habitats and control threats. The good news is that many landholders and Landcare groups, as well as Greening Australia, BirdLife Australia and the NSW Government are working together to help protect and restore woodland habitats for our beautiful threatened birds. Programs such as *Saving Our Species* (SoS) and the Biodiversity Conservation Trust are providing much-needed funds to help landholders and groups achieve these goals. The most important first management step we can take is to protect existing woodland habitat.

## Canopy dwellers

Woodland tree-canopy dwellers such as honeyeaters, parrots and lorikeets need large nectar and lerp-rich trees to feed in. Lerp are the white, sugary caps of leaf-sucking insects that you sometimes see on leaves. Young trees provide an abundance of lerp and dense, leafy roosting habitat. Woodlands with mistletoe – native parasitic plants that grow on woodland trees – support higher numbers of bird species and are home to the painted honeyeater, which feeds exclusively on the fruit and nectar of mistletoes. Birds of prey like the little eagle need tall trees with dense foliage for nesting and roosting. Here's what you can do to help:

- Retain woodland and forest patches with a mixture of large trees, smaller regrowth trees and regenerating saplings. We recommend that you fence off these patches from stock at strategic times.
- Increase the size of woodland areas by fencing cleared areas that are close to existing woodland to allow natural regeneration. This is cheaper than replanting trees and shrubs. You can still graze these areas once the trees and shrubs get established.
- Reconnect patches of woodland to allow fauna to move between them by fencing and replanting locally indigenous flora species. For example, plant paddock trees, spaced no more than 50 metres apart, across paddocks. Or create small (20 metre x 20 metre) 'stepping stones' of dense shrubs and trees, spaced 50 metres or closer, to allow small birds to move between them.
- Retain some mistletoes as important bird habitat. The host trees generally tolerate a moderate level of infestation.



## Hollow nesters

Our woodland owls, parrots and treecreepers, possums, gliders and bats roost and nest in hollows of all shapes and sizes – in dead and living trees, tree stumps and fallen timber. Hollows take a hundred or more years to form in woodland trees, so if we continue to lose them it will take at least several human generations to get them back in the landscape. Here are some suggestions:

- Leave dead trees with hollows to stand. They might stay there for another hundred years, providing important breeding habitat for parrots and owls and functioning as stepping stones between patches of woodland.
- Protect living hollow-bearing trees from stock ring-barking, fires and soil compaction. Fencing off areas around these trees to allow natural regeneration provides a long-term insurance policy for future generations of hollow-nesters. You could try planting shrubs around fenced paddock trees to add habitat structure and protection for small birds.
- Retain isolated paddock trees because they provide important habitats for birds and other fauna. They often have their own unique invertebrate communities and they also act as stepping stones between woodland patches. They are also an aesthetic feature of our agricultural landscapes and give vital shade and shelter for stock. We will all miss them when they are gone.



## Ground and shrub dwellers

Many insect-eating woodland birds feed and nest in shrubs or on the ground. They need structure and diversity in the ground and understorey layers. Even birds that usually forage and nest in the canopy come down to the shrub and grass layer to feed on insects, seeds and fruits. And they build their nests from shrubs and grasses. Here are some ideas:

- Use fencing to rest your woodland from stock at strategic times of the year (usually mid-spring and through summer) to allow grasses, shrubs and trees to flower, seed and regenerate. In autumn and winter grazing can be a useful way of reducing the biomass of exotic grass species, which in turn will give native grasses a chance to increase in abundance.
- Resist 'tidying up' and burning dead, fallen timber and stumps. Birds, small mammals, reptiles, frogs and many invertebrates that provide food for birds live in and under timber on the ground.
- Control weeds to allow native grasses and shrubs to regenerate in woodland patches.
- To get on top of foxes, for the sake of curlews and other small ground-dwelling fauna, baiting is recommended at least four, but ideally six, times per year. The best outcomes happen when this is coordinated with neighbours. Look out for locally run baiting projects and convince your neighbours to join you.
- Manage the area around your woodland to reduce fire risk. Find out more about ecological fire management through the Rural Fire Service Hot Spots Fire Project.



*Saving our Species* is a NSW Government flagship program targeting on-ground action to secure NSW's threatened plants and animals from extinction. The program aims to increase the number of species that can survive securely in the wild. *Saving our Species* can only succeed if we work together.

To find out more about threatened species in New South Wales and the *Saving Our Species* program, go to: [environment.nsw.gov.au/SOS](http://environment.nsw.gov.au/SOS)

We thank all our partners in threatened woodland bird conservation including:

**Biodiversity Conservation Trust** [www.bct.nsw.gov.au](http://www.bct.nsw.gov.au)

**BirdLife Australia** [www.birdlife.org.au](http://www.birdlife.org.au)

**Landcare** [landcarensw.org.au](http://landcarensw.org.au)

**Greening Australia** [www.greeningaustralia.org.au](http://www.greeningaustralia.org.au)

**Hotspots Fire Project** [hotspotsfireproject.org.au](http://hotspotsfireproject.org.au)



**Biodiversity  
Conservation  
Trust**



Photos

Cover: Regent honeyeater. Michael Todd

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Hollow image: Superb parrot in a hollow. David Parker/EES

Ground cover image: Tablelands grassy woodland. Lorraine Oliver/EES

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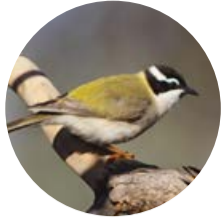
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## Canopy dwellers



**Black-chinned honeyeater**  
*Meliphreptus gularis*

A small short-beaked honeyeater usually seen at the very top of the canopy of tall trees in relatively large (greater than 10 hectares) woodland remnants. It feeds on nectar and lerp in a variety of tree species, especially ironbarks, red gums and white box.

Photo: Dean Ingwersen/Enviro Imagery



**Swift parrot**  
*Lathamus discolor*

An annual autumn-winter migratory visitor from Tasmania. It forages mainly in the canopy of woodlands that are flowering or have a high abundance of lerp. It also forages in the shrub layer, particularly on wattles.

Photo: Dave Watts/DPIE



**Little eagle**  
*Hieraaetus morphnoides*

Gorgeous small eagle with distinctive under-wing patterns. It nests in tall living trees with a dense canopy and sometimes builds nests on top of mistletoes. It feeds in open grassy areas on rabbits and small parrots.

Photo: Charles Dove/DPIE



**Varied sittella**  
*Daphoenositta chrysoptera*

A smaller version of the treecreeper, small flocks of varied sittellas can be seen foraging on the outer limbs and canopy of woodland and mallee trees. Unlike treecreepers, which move upwards when foraging, sittellas often move down branches. They feed on insects in good quality woodland and mallee patches.

Photo: Dean Ingwersen/Enviro Imagery



**Dusky woodswallow**  
*Artamus cyanopterus*

Among the masters of the sky, woodswallows can often be seen in flocks high in the sky feeding on insects. They will also feed on flowering woodland eucalypts. They build flimsy stick platforms to nest on, which are quite vulnerable to predators. They usually prefer woodland patches with a diversity of tree, shrub and groundcover structure.

Photo: Chris Tzaros



**Square-tailed kite**  
*Lophoictinia isura*

This kite nests in tall mature trees, often close to watercourses. It forages amongst the canopy and edges of woodlands for small birds and it occupies a home range of up to 100 square kilometres.

Photo: Shane Ruming/DPIE



**Painted honeyeater**  
*Grantiella picta*

This attractive honeyeater with a distinctive 'Georgie' call is heavily reliant on woodlands that support high densities of mistletoes for food and nesting. It is often seen on the edges of woodlands where mistletoes are at highest abundance. It can be found in scattered woodlands but prefers intact patches of vegetation.

Photo: Michael Todd



**Regent honeyeater**  
*Anthochaera phrygia*

One of Australia's most threatened woodland birds. It nests in tall eucalypts in box-ironbark and box-gum woodland, in river she-oaks along riparian gallery forests and sometimes in mistletoes. It forages on nectar, lerp, mistletoe fruit and insects, often in the biggest trees in a woodland patch. A good quality shrub layer is important for foraging and nest material.

Photo: Michael Todd/DPIE

## Hollow Nesters



**Powerful owl**  
*Ninox strenua*

This owl lives in relatively large patches of tall forest and woodland and nests in very large, old hollow-bearing trees with hollows greater than 40 centimetres in diameter. Needs large areas of good quality habitat with high densities of possums and gliders.

Photo: Rosie Nicolai/DPIE



**Barking owl**  
*Ninox connivens*

This owl's name comes from the distinctive dog-barking call it makes at night. It needs large hollow-bearing trees with large (greater than 20 centimetres in diameter) hollows for nesting and trees with dense foliage for roosting. It has a home range of more than 2000 hectares.

Photo: Lachlan Copeland/DPIE



**Glossy black-cockatoo**  
*Calyptorhynchus lathami*

This small cockatoo nests in large dead or living hollow-bearing trees with hollows greater than 20 centimetres in diameter, often along watercourses or drainage lines. It relies specifically on the seeds of a small number of species of *Allocasuarina* (she-oaks) for food.

Photo: John Spencer/DPIE



**Pink cockatoo**  
*Lophochroa leadbeateri*

A beautiful semi-arid and arid-zone woodland cockatoo that nests in mature hollow-bearing trees in mallee, or in woodland with belah, cypress pine or eucalypts. It forages in open grassy areas, shrubs and trees.

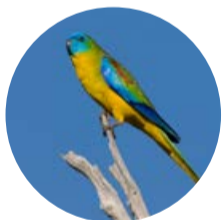
Photo: David Finnegan/DPIE



**Superb parrot**  
*Polytelis swainsonii*

A spectacular fast-flying green parrot. It nests in large dead and living eucalypts, often along major watercourses, or in paddock trees. It forages on the ground on native and exotic grasses and herbs, on native shrubs such as wattles and hopbushes, in cereal crops, on eucalypt flowers and fruit and mistletoes.

Photo: David Ingram/DPIE



**Turquoise parrot**  
*Neophema pulchella*

This gorgeous small parrot nests in tree hollows, stumps and hollow fence posts. It feeds in open grassy areas close to the edge of woodlands. In some places, the species has adapted to foraging on introduced grasses and capeweed, but still prefers diverse native ground cover. It has been shown to adapt to nesting in artificial nesting boxes.

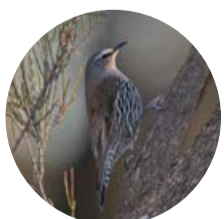
Photo: Ken Stepnell/DPIE



**Brown treecreeper**  
*Climacteris picumnus*

Australia's equivalent of the woodpecker, this treecreeper is often seen foraging along tree trunks for insects and on dead fallen timber. It nests in tree hollows, tree stumps and dead fallen timber with hollows. Needs patches of woodland greater than 5 hectares that are well connected to other patches.

Photo: Ken Stepnell/DPIE



**White-browed treecreeper**  
*Climacteris affinis*

This treecreeper occurs in the drier woodlands around Griffith and south of the Lachlan River in the Carrathool local government area. It forages on tree trunks for insects and on dead fallen timber. It nests in tree hollows, tree stumps and dead fallen timber with hollows and lives in well-connected patches of woodland.

Photo: Michael Todd/DPIE

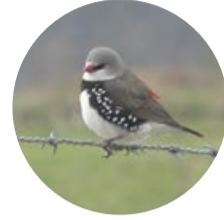
## Ground and shrub dwellers



**Bush stone-curlew**  
*Burhinus grallarius*

A favourite with landholders, especially those that still have birds in their area. Older landholders can often remember hearing the bush stone-curlew's eerie call at night. It lives in open grassy woodland with fallen dead timber and abundant leaf litter. Susceptible to fox predation.

Photo: Michael Todd/DPIE



**Diamond firetail**  
*Stagonopleura guttata*

A beautiful red-rumped finch that requires good quality native grassland for foraging and woodland with good shrub cover for nesting. It prefers larger woodland remnants greater than 5 hectares.

Jackie Miles/DPIE



**Grey-crowned babbler**  
*Pomatostomus temporalis temporalis*

One of the real characters of the woodland bird world, with its distinctive call and family group behaviour. It builds nests and roosting 'drays' in dense shrubs and forages in both shrubs and on open ground close to woodland edges. Needs well-connected habitat and corridors to move through the landscape.

Photo: Lachlan Copeland/DPIE



**Hooded robin**  
*Melanodryas cucullata*

This robin needs areas of open woodland and open grassy areas that extend over at least 10 hectares, with a decent mix of shrubs, grasses and timber on the ground.

Photo: Dean Ingwersen/Enviro Imagery



**Speckled warbler**  
*Pyrrholaemus sagittatus*

A hard-to-spot bird that needs a mixture of sparse shrubs, patches of tall dense grass and regrowth eucalypts and native cypress pines. It can occur in patches as small as 1 hectare provided they are close to larger patches. Prefers larger remnants greater than 5 hectares.

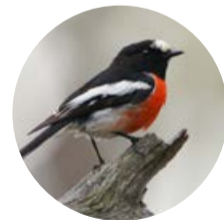
Photo: Michael Todd/DPIE



**Gilbert's whistler**  
*Pachycephala inornata*

This songster of the inland bush lives in woodland and mallee woodlands with a dense shrub layer. It nests in shrubs and forages in shrubs and on the ground.

Photo: Chris Tzaros



**Scarlet robin**  
*Petroica boodang*

A much-loved autumn and winter visitor to farms, the beautiful scarlet robin forages in both open farming country, often perched on fences, but also in open woodlands with fallen dead timber and some shrub cover. It breeds at higher altitudes in spring and summer.

Photo: Dean Ingwersen/Enviro Imagery



**Flame robin**  
*Petroica phoenicea*

Like the scarlet robin, this beautiful seasonal and altitudinal migrant brings joy to everyone when it arrives in autumn and winter from its higher altitude breeding range. These robins are often seen on the edge of woodlands, where they forage on the ground for insects, or within open grassy woodlands with sufficient fallen dead timber to provide perches.

Photo: Jackie Miles/DPIE