

## **Threatened Woodland Birds in NSW**

I want you to close your eyes and imagine you are out in the bush

Can you hear the different bird calls? Do you know what kinds of birds they are?

Some of these birds might live in your garden or in the bush on your farm or around your school

We are very lucky to have so many native birds here in Australia

There have been over 860 species recorded in Australia

### **Woodland birds**

Today we will learn about birds that live in woodlands across NSW

In NSW there are more than 250 species of bird that live in our woodlands

However, each different woodland type has a slightly different bird community in it.

In NSW and many other parts of Australia, many woodlands have been cleared and much of this loss occurred a long time ago.

The remaining woodland patches are often small and have been grazed by sheep, cows or rabbits for a long time.

This has meant that some plants and animals, including birds have become rare or threatened since their habitat was removed.

In many cases we have seen species become threatened in just the last few decades

In NSW around 250 bird species live in woodlands

Nearly one quarter of these species are now 'threatened' which means that they could go extinct if we don't look after them

Another quarter of the woodland bird species are described as 'declining species' which means that their numbers have dropped sharply in the last 20 years. These species are at risk of becoming threatened in the near future without our help

So this means that about half of our woodland bird species in NSW are in trouble

### **Different types of threatened woodland birds**

One way to think about how bird species are different from one another is where they live, feed and nest and the types of habitats that they need

## **Ground-dwelling birds**

If we start on the ground layer, birds that spend all or most of their lives on the ground are called Ground-dwellers. They feed and nest on the ground. Some species spend only some of their time on the ground and spend the rest of their time in shrubs, trees and flying in the air.

Ground-dwelling birds need habitat features such as:

- Native grasses
- Leaf litter
- Dead fallen timber like logs and branches
- and some like rocky areas

The Bush Stone-curlew spends almost all of its time on the ground in woodlands where there are native grasses and fallen timber. The Bush Stone-curlew often builds a nest close to a fallen branch. This unusual bird is now very rare in NSW

The Speckled Warbler spends a lot of time foraging on the ground between grasses, under shrubs and around rocky areas. It sometimes builds its nest on the ground. It also likes to live in thick patches of small eucalypts and native pine trees.

Further west in the woodlands that we call mallee, where the trees are small and have many trunks coming out of the ground, the Chestnut Quail-thrush spends most of its time feeding on the ground for insects and seeds. It builds a nest on the ground between grasses

## **Shrub-dwelling birds**

If we move our way up from the ground layer into the shrub layer, shrubs provide foods like:

- Nectar from flowers
- Fruit
- Seeds
- And insects and other invertebrates that live in the shrubs

Shrubs usually have lots of leaves, which are often prickly which can provide protection from predators and are a safe place to build a nest

The Grey-crowned Babbler is a threatened woodland bird that builds large stick nests in tall shrubs. They use some of these nests to huddle together in at night in a family group. These nests are called 'drays'.

The beautiful Splendid and Variegated Fairy Wrens are thankfully still fairly common in NSW. They spend most of their time in amongst dense shrubs where they feed on insects and build their nests.

The Black Honeyeater and Pied Honeyeater live in far western NSW and feed on the nectar and fruits of lots of different types of flowering shrubs. You can see their long curved beaks that they use to probe inside flowers. They nest in shrubs as well. During droughts these birds sometimes move into woodlands in eastern NSW when there is nothing left to eat in their habitat further west

The Crested Bellbird lives in western NSW in both woodlands and mallee with a good shrub layer. This bird has an amazing call.

### **Tree-dwelling birds - canopy**

If we move from the shrub layer up into the canopy of the trees, we find the next group of birds which are called canopy or tree dwellers.

There are quite a few threatened woodland birds that spend most of their time in amongst the leaves and flowers of trees. The Regent Honeyeater and Swift Parrot are two of the most threatened woodland birds in NSW. They feed mostly on nectar, fruit and insects. They need big old trees because bigger trees produce more food.

### **Tree-dwelling birds – mistletoes**

Trees often have another type of plant attached to them – these are called mistletoes which live on the water and nutrients from the tree they are attached to. Mistletoes flowers produce nectar and fruit for the threatened Painted Honeyeater. A lot of woodland birds build their nests in the middle of mistletoes for protection.

### **Tree-dwelling birds – bark**

Another group of canopy dwelling birds likes to feed under the bark of trees. The Crested Shrike-tit is a declining woodland birds that feeds on insects and spiders under the peeling bark of eucalypts trees

### **Tree-dwelling birds – hollow-dwelling**

Many threatened canopy dwelling birds need tree hollows for breeding and roosting. Hollow-dwelling birds include parrots like the beautiful green Superb Parrot and owls like the Barking Owl (add Barking Owl sound file). Large old trees especially ones you see in farm paddocks and parks provide important habitat for these species. Even old dead trees provide very important habitat

It is important that we look after these big old trees which are often several hundred years old. We also have to think to the future and start planting some young trees that will eventually replace these old trees when they die.

### **What makes a good woodland for birds?**

A woodland area with some or all of the following features will provide important habitat for woodland birds including some of the threatened species that I have shown you:

Firstly, the size of the patch of woodland and how close it is to other patches of woodland is very important as some birds need lots of woodland and enough connections to move between patches

Other birds do not always need lots of connections between patches of woodland, but they still need stepping stones like big old paddock tree to move from place to place

A woodland with big old trees is important for honeyeaters and birds that need hollows

Trees with mistletoes provide extra food and habitat as well

Even if there are no big old trees, a woodland with young trees is still important for many bird species.

A woodland that has lots of native grasses or other small ground cover plants provides good habitat for invertebrates like spiders and insects, and also reptiles and small native mammals

A woodland that also has some shrubs is important for birds that feed and nest in shrubs.

A woodland with all or most of these different features is called a high conservation value woodland

A woodland with just one of these features is also important and can be improved by planting local native trees, shrubs and grasses, managing grazing and controlling weeds

### **So what is being done to help save our threatened woodland birds?**

In the last 40 years lots of scientists have studied woodland birds

We now know some of the reasons why woodland birds have become threatened

This information is now being used by lots of land managers including farmers to try and improve our woodlands to help save birds and other organisms that live in them

The planting of trees, shrubs and grasses, the removal of weeds and reducing the amount of grazing all help restore our woodlands

There is still much more to learn about our woodland birds and lots of people, including kids, are still studying them today

I hope that you now understand that our wonderful woodland birds need our help

You can find out more about birds by doing some birdwatching on your own or in a group – get your school to buy a bird field guide

Perhaps your school might like to look after a local woodland patch or do some planting of local woodland plants in the school to attract birds

How about planting some native trees in your backyard?

With your help, we can make sure these beautiful birds are still around when your grandchildren are at school!