

COORDINATED CONSERVATION PLAN

Subtropical woodlands

1 Description

South-eastern Queensland, north-eastern New South Wales, between Gunnedah, Charleville and Chinchilla. The region receives between about 650 and 1,200 mm annual average rainfall. Dominant vegetation types are eucalypt and brigalow woodlands, most of which have been cleared, and some semi-evergreen vine thicket. There are few conservation reserves in the region and those there are contain wetter forests.

The Subtropical Woodlands region shares many species with the Temperate Woodlands and Mt Lofty Ranges regions, but is distinguished by the presence of Paradise Parrot (now extinct) and Black-throated Finch (southern) and persistence of Squatter Pigeon (southern) and Australian Bustard.

2 IBRA Regions

Subtropical slopes and plains (Brigalow Belt South, Darling Riverina Plain), Temperate Highlands (Nandewar, New England Tablelands).

3 Core taxa

Extinct

Paradise Parrot

Locally Extinct

Star Finch (southern)

Endangered

Swift Parrot

Regent Honeyeater

Vulnerable

Australasian Bittern

Painted Snipe (Australian)

Black-throated Finch (southern)

Near Threatened

Little Bittern (Australasian)

Grey Falcon

Australian Bustard

Bush Stone-curlew

Squatter Pigeon (southern)

Glossy Black-Cockatoo (eastern)

Superb Parrot

Turquoise Parrot

Barking Owl (southern)

Masked Owl (southern Australian)

White-browed Treecreeper (eastern)

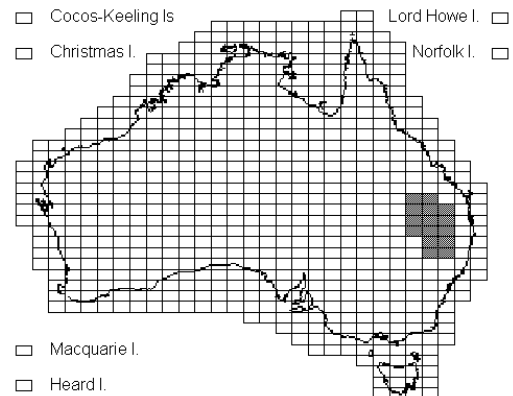
Brown Treecreeper (south-eastern)

Speckled Warbler

Black-chinned Honeyeater

Painted Honeyeater

Hooded Robin (south-eastern)



Grey-crowned Babbler (eastern)

Crested Bellbird (southern)

Diamond Firetail

4 Conservation issues

Most subtropical woodland habitat has been cleared, including about 90% of the Brigalow, 80% of the Darling River Plain, and 75% of the New England tablelands and Nandewar bioregions. Land clearance, which concentrates on good quality agricultural land, has probably destroyed the most favourable habitats. This is of particular consequence for the migratory Regent Honeyeater and Swift Parrot, both of which seek out heavily flowering eucalypts on fertile soils. Remaining woodland habitat is fragmented and continues to be degraded by inappropriate fire regimes, weed invasion and, particularly during drought, sheep and rabbit grazing. Heavy sheep grazing early in the 20th century was probably responsible for the disappearance of the Paradise Parrot, and local extinctions of Squatter Pigeons, Turquoise Parrots, and Black-throated and Star Finches.

Species vary in their ability to cope with fragmentation, Crested Bellbird and Hooded Robins persist only in the largest fragments (over 5,000 ha). Once lost from a fragment, recolonisation is unlikely without assistance. Local extinctions are occurring up to 50 years after clearing occurred. With clearing continuing and in some regions, over 90% remnant vegetation being in patches smaller than 500 ha, local extinctions are likely to continue for many decades to come.

Within fragments, essential habitat features that may be lost are leaf litter and sticks, and their associated invertebrates needed by Bush Stone-curlew and Grey-crowned Babbler, hollows suitable for nesting by cockatoos and treecreepers and key food plants for Beautiful Firetails. For treecreepers, and possibly babbler, females dispersing from fragments to find mates are unlikely to be replaced, so many fragments are below carrying capacity.

Foxes may have exacerbated habitat loss and caused further declines in ground-dwelling taxa, such as Squatter Pigeons, Bush Stone-curlew and Turquoise Parrots. Fragmentation may also favour open-country native species like Noisy Miners *Manorina melanocephala*, Pied Butcherbirds *Cracticus nigrogularis* and Pied Currawongs *Strepera graculina* which prey on smaller taxa or exclude them from their territories. Trapping of parrots and finches for the bird trade may also have exacerbated local declines.

The health of wetlands in the region is linked to woodland management. Many of these wetlands have been drained, degraded by overgrazing or have dried up as a result of water extraction upstream. They are important habitats for bitterns and Painted Snipe and several near threatened wetland birds.

5 Recommended management

- 5.1 Place all significant habitat on public land under secure conservation management, particularly those in timber reserves, transport corridors and local government land.
- 5.2 Manage at least 15% of the pre-European area of all woodland communities on public or private land for nature conservation, using incentives where necessary.
- 5.3 Undertake extension with land-holders that have suitable woodland habitat to promote sound management of remnants, encouraging greater connectivity between sub-populations.
- 5.4 Develop agreements with land-holders to maintain the litter layer and fallen timber debris within wooded remnants.
- 5.5 Promote revegetation and land reclamation that recreates woodland habitat with a full complement of biodiversity.
- 5.6 Locate significant populations of Star Finches, Black-throated Finches and Squatter Pigeons, and assess conservation requirements.
- 5.7 Undertake long-term monitoring of other core taxa, establishing regular monitoring sites, preferably with the co-operation of local land-holders or conservation organisations.
- 5.8 Where cats and/or foxes are a recognised problem, maintain or establish feral predator control.
- 5.9 Where appropriate, maintain fire regime that establish a mosaic of fire ages.
- 5.10 Coordinate implementation of conservation management at a regional level.

6 Organisations responsible for conservation

Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service.

7 Other organisations involved

Birds Australia, Birds Queensland, other bird-watching societies, Environment Australia, Greening Australia, Taronga Zoo, Latrobe University, University of New England, World Wide Fund for Nature (Australia), road transport authorities, Rural Lands Protection Boards, Queensland Department of Natural Resources, Queensland Department of Primary Industry, State Forests of New South Wales, Landcare groups, shire councils, private land-holders, pastoralists.

8 References

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