

RECOVERY OUTLINE

Swift Parrot

1	Family	Psittacidae
2	Scientific name	<i>Lathamus discolor</i> (Shaw, 1790)
3	Common name	Swift Parrot
4	Conservation status	Endangered: C2b

5 Reasons for listing

The single breeding population numbers between 250 and 2,500 mature individuals and is probably declining (Endangered: C2b).

	Estimate	Reliability
Extent of occurrence	860,000 km ²	medium
trend	decreasing	medium
Area of occupancy	4,000 km ²	low
trend	decreasing	medium
No. of breeding birds	2,000	medium
trend	decreasing	medium
No. of sub-populations	1	high
Generation time	2 years	low

6 Intraspecific taxa

None described.

7 Past range and abundance

Breeds only in Tasmania, mostly nesting along south-eastern coast, but also between Launceston and Smithton, always within 8 km of coast (Brereton, 1998). Post-breeding dispersal throughout Tasmania from January. Most birds migrate to mainland in autumn, majority over-wintering on inland slopes of Great Dividing Ra., particularly in Victoria and central and eastern New South Wales, usually smaller numbers reaching south-east Queensland, as far north as Duaranga and west to Chinchilla and south-east South Australia, as far west as Adelaide Plains (Higgins, 1999). Small numbers over-winter in south-east and north-west Tasmania. Non-breeding birds are highly mobile, their movements varying between years (Hindwood and Sharland, 1964, Brown, 1989).

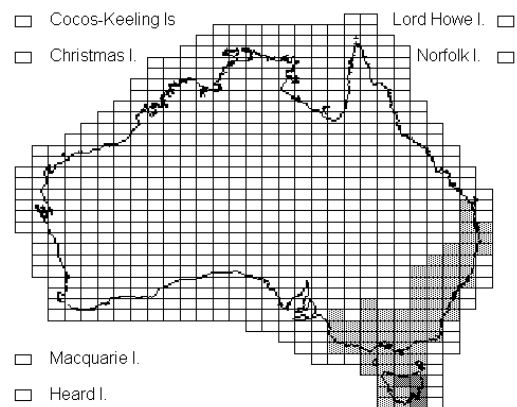
Migrants return in spring, forming flocks of up to 70 birds in breeding areas (Brereton, 1996).

8 Present range and abundance

As above, but area used greatly reduced; foraging habitat used by breeding birds reduced by half (Brereton, 1997). In both Queensland and South Australia, recent records irregular and all from far south-east corner of each State. Population estimates: 1987/1988, about 5,000 birds, with 1,320 breeding pairs (Brown, 1989); 1995/1996, 1,000 breeding pairs (940 located; Plowman, 1996).

9 Ecology

In Tasmania, breeding Swift Parrots are almost always associated with Blue Gum *Eucalyptus globulus* or Swamp Gum *E. ovata*, most birds foraging in remnant patches of Blue Gum forest that are less than 1 ha in size (Brereton, 1996). They nest in hollows of senescent eucalypts, usually away from feeding sites (Brereton, 1997, 1998), and have an average clutch size of about 5 (Higgins, 1999). Flowering may only be sufficient to support breeding in three years out of every ten. On the mainland, Swift Parrots live in eucalypt forests and woodlands, particularly box-ironbark forests, and feed primarily on nectar, though they will also take lerp (Higgins, 1999). They show a preference for sites of high soil fertility, where large trees have high nectar production, such as along drainage lines or in isolated rural or urban remnants (Emison *et al.*, 1987, Tzaros, 1996, 1997). There is also a correlation between the presence of Swift Parrots and the intensity of flowering by Golden Wattle *Acacia pycnantha*, although the reason for this is not known (Mac Nally and Horrocks, 2000). Sites used by Swift Parrots on the mainland vary from year to year, as does nectar availability (Wilson and Bennett, 1999), although some sites were used repeatedly (S. Kennedy, C. Tzaros).



10 Threats

The population of the Swift Parrot is small and probably declining. Breeding habitat in Tasmania has been significantly reduced and fragmented through the clearance of Blue Gums for agriculture and residential development, sawlog production and clearfelling for woodchips (Brown, 1989, Brereton, 1998). Availability of nest hollows in remaining habitat continues to decline as a result of forestry operations, particularly

firewood collection (Brereton, 1998), and competition for nest hollows with Common Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris* could be a problem along forest edges (Brown, 1989). These factors are likely to limit breeding success. Clearance is continuing apace without legislative controls and the species' decline is likely to continue if the remaining habitat, which is mostly on private land (80%) or unreserved crown land (6%; Brereton, 1997) is not protected. Even with protection, maintenance and recovery are likely to be limited by the dependence of breeding on an irregular supply of nectar (Brown, 1989, Brereton, 1996). The species also suffers high mortality through collision with windows, vehicles and fences in the breeding season. The species is further threatened on the mainland, where clearance for agriculture and residential development has also destroyed most habitat, including 85% of box-ironbark forests in Victoria and over 70% in New South Wales (Sivertsen, 1993, Traill, 1993, Robinson and Traill, 1996, B. J. Traill). Remnants tend to have few large trees and continue to be cut-over to produce poles, posts, sleepers, sawlogs and firewood (Brown, 1989). Competition from large nectarivores may be exacerbated by forest fragmentation (Ford, 1993), though presence of Swift Parrots and other larger honeyeaters is positively correlated (Mac Nally and Horrocks, 2000).

11 Information required

- 11.1 Investigate the foraging ecology of the Swift Parrot within its overwintering range, particularly the box-ironbark forests in central and north-eastern Vic. and on inland slopes, N. S. W.
- 11.2 Investigate the patterns of flowering and nectar production in forests used by Swift Parrots across breeding and wintering range.
- 11.3 Identify and map foraging habitat in Tas. and on the mainland.
- 11.4 Identify mainland roost sites

12 Recovery objectives

- 12.1 Down-listing of species from Endangered to Vulnerable by 2007.

13 Actions completed or under way

- 13.1 Population surveys in Tas. and on the mainland have been undertaken and are continuing.
- 13.2 Foraging habitat used during the breeding season outside the natural range of Blue Gum has been identified.

- 13.3 A public information and education program is being conducted to inform and involve community in the recovery process.
- 13.4 Priority foraging and nesting sites on private land are being strategically targeted for protection under land management agreements or covenants.
- 13.5 Retention, enhancement and protection of habitat on public land in Tas. and on the mainland is being encouraged.
- 13.6 Guidelines for forestry in Blue Gum forests in Tas. have been developed and are being refined, including silvicultural treatments of foraging habitat to improve stand quality.
- 13.7 The frequency of collisions with fences and other structures is being reduced.
- 13.8 The recovery process is being managed through a Recovery Team.

14 Management actions required

- 14.1 Develop a strategy to safeguard a continued supply of suitable nest hollows.
- 14.2 In both breeding and non-breeding range, protect all woodland types regularly used by Swift Parrots from activities such as clearing, logging and firewood collection, monitoring compliance biennially.
- 14.3 Protect all Swift Parrot sites on public land in secure conservation reserves.
- 14.4 Manage at least 15% of the pre-European area of all woodland communities on public or private land for nature conservation, using incentives, where appropriate.

15 Organisations responsible for conservation

Environment ACT, New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, South Australian Department of Environment and Heritage, Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service, Victorian Department of Natural Resources and Environment.

16 Other organisations involved

Birds Australia, other bird-watching societies, local government, Parks Victoria, Department of Defence, Healesville Sanctuary, Australian Regional Association of Zoological Parks and Aquaria, Australian Non-passerine Taxon Advisory Group, Greening Australia, University of Tasmania, University of Wollongong, Landcare groups, timber harvesters, private land-holders.

Wilson, J. and Bennett, A. 1999. Patchiness of a floral resource: flowering of Red Ironbark *Eucalyptus tricarpa* in a box ironbark forest. *Vic. Nat.* 116: 8-53.

Comments received from

Raymond Brereton, Simon Kennedy, Kim Lowe, Ralph Mac Nally, Peter Ormay, Bruce Quin, Doug Robinson, Barry Traill, Chris Tzaros.