

# CONSERVATION CORNER

## Birds for Biodiversity

### A Little Knowledge Can Be Dangerous !

The plight of the birds in the Mount Lofty Ranges is a topic that will doubtless be depressingly familiar to you all — a sorry tale in which the chief protagonists of land clearing, habitat loss and habitat degradation, sit alongside a copious supporting cast of threatening processes. Thus far, approximately 10 species have become regionally extinct, possibly including the MLR Spotted Quail Thrush, a sub-species unique to the region that hasn't been reliably recorded for 20 years. In addition to the extinctions, a further 65 species have been identified as declining and many of these could themselves be facing eventual extinction in the region. These range from species that are now extremely rare, such as the Restless Flycatcher, to species that were formerly abundant but are becoming increasingly scarce, such as the Scarlet Robin and White-naped Honeyeater.

Sadly, the story is also a universal one, acted out on the world stage from Adelaide to Addis Ababa, and readily translated into many languages. Yet for all the intricately woven issues of weed invasion, feral predator interactions, disproportionate habitat loss, and a myriad of other nasties, one of the least renowned but most insidious threats to species recovery is a lack of knowledge. Despite a considerable body of research having been directed at such issues as the ecology of declining species and their response to various threatening processes, there is still a great deal we do not know.

One of the most fundamental knowledge gaps is that of the distribution, movements and numbers of many of the declining birds in the region. Whilst we have reasonable data for many of the more popular birding sites and some locations in the reserve system, this provides only a fragment of the overall picture. Birds are quite frankly an uncooperative bunch, and simply refuse to stay put in the protected areas!

Consequently data is required from under watched localities such as private land, road reserves and the less frequented national and conservation parks. This will help to fill in the missing pieces of the avian jigsaw, and will provide information regarding where to focus future management activities.

For instance, Diamond Firetails (pictured to the right) feed on a range of native grass seeds that emerge throughout the year in open woodlands, grasslands and even paddocks. Native grasses have largely been replaced by introduced species, which the birds will also eat. However, the introduced grasses only seed for a short period each year, resulting in the Firetails having to move on in search of food. Where these birds forage and to what extent they utilise introduced grasses in conjunction with natives is not well known. We all know that you can see DFs at Sandy Creek and Kaiserstuhl, but what about the rest of the region? This is precisely the kind of information that will prove essential if the species is to be conserved in the region and beyond.



The Birds for Biodiversity Program has been specifically funded to develop a recovery plan for the declining birds of the Mount Lofty Ranges, and to obtain a clearer picture of where declining species are present (and absent) in the region is one of many recovery activities being undertaken. The Birds for Biodiversity project officers are presently implementing a range of bird surveys designed to address some of these knowledge gaps.



**Brown Treecreeper**  
Populations of this rare species  
are becoming increasingly  
isolated from one another.

Seven species have been chosen for single-species surveys that aim to provide information on the location and numbers of some of our most threatened birds. These include the Brown Treecreeper (pictured to the left), a bird that is disappearing from many of its former haunts, and the Crested Shrike-tit, an enigmatic and elusive species that is the emblem of Birds for Biodiversity. These species are being used as pilot studies for the surveys as a whole, and it is hoped that they will be the prelude to more extensive surveys in the future, focusing on many more declining species.

The Birds for Biodiversity Program is currently seeking volunteers to take part in these surveys; if you are interested in becoming involved, then a free information pack can be obtained by contacting:

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