

# Birds of the Wet Tropics

The Wet Tropics World Heritage Area is one of the most prolific areas for bird life in Australia with a diverse range of habitats such as rainforest, woodlands, mangroves, grasslands and lagoons. This range of habitats has resulted in over 400 different species being recorded in the region, 13 of which are “endemic” (found nowhere else in the world).

Over half of Australia’s pigeons, nine out of ten kingfishers and seven of nine owls can be found here. These images represent a selection of rainforest birds found in our wilderness and, luckily, some of our backyards.

Of the species pictured only the southern cassowary is flightless. This endangered bird is Australia’s largest bird, standing as high as a human. Two other variant species of cassowary inhabit New Guinea.

## Bird’s backyard –top spots

If you are keen to see some of the Wet Tropics birds, Birds Australia recommends the following locations:

- Daintree National Park- Jindalba boardwalk and Mossman Gorge.
- Cairns Esplanade, Machans Beach, Centenary Lakes and Mt Whitfield.
- Atherton Tableland: Mt Lewis, Mareeba Wetlands, Hasties Swamp, Bromfield Swamp, Lake Barrine, Lake Eacham, Malanda Falls and Kuranda.
- Lacey Creek and Licuala Forest near Mission Beach.
- Murray Falls near Cardwell.
- Broadwater State Forest near Ingham.
- Mt Spec at Paluma.
- Bluewater near Townsville.

## Attracting birds to your garden

We are lucky in the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area to have a wide range of birds, many of them visiting our gardens. Watching these birds from the comfort of your own home is rewarding and by planting native trees and shrubs you can make it even more attractive to birds. Gardens backing onto rainforest areas will attract birds such as the Emerald Dove or Australian Brush-turkey, which loves to scrape up your mulch and generally re-arrange your garden!

- Reduce your lawn area and plant native fruit bearing trees, and shrubs such as the fast-growing nectar-bearing species like grevilleas and callistemons (bottlebrushes). This will help reduce introduced species such has the Common Myna and House Sparrow.
- Provide a birdbath using a shallow dish approx. 2m from the ground near a small shrub. This will provide water for birds to drink, bathe and preen in. Be patient at first as it may take several weeks for birds to find the water.
- Keep your pets indoors especially cats as they prey on birds, often killing for pleasure not food.

# **Birds of the Wet Tropics**

## **Catching more than a glimpse**

With a pair of binoculars and a bird identification book you can really appreciate the variety and colours of the region's birds. The most suitable binoculars are 7x35 or 8x40 which provide close focussing and a wider field of view to make finding birds easier. Specialised bird books are: "Birds of Queensland's Wet Tropics and Great Barrier Reef" by Lloyd Nielsen and "Where to Find Birds in North-East Queensland" by Jo Wieneke. Get started now!

If you are interested in finding out more about wild birds and their habitats then you should contact Birds Australia.

You can participate in field trips as well as conservation and research projects that provide positive results for the future of our birds. [www.birdsaustralia.com.au](http://www.birdsaustralia.com.au) or email [lkfisher@optusnet.com.au](mailto:lkfisher@optusnet.com.au)

## **Birdwatching basics**

To make birdwatching more enjoyable, try some of the following:

- Use binoculars and a field guide to enhance your birdwatching knowledge.
- Make up a chart and record all the birds that you see, when and where.
- Look for indirect evidence of birds such as scratching, feathers, droppings and damaged fruits and flowers.
- Join a bird club and learn from experienced members.

Once you become familiar with your garden birds you may want to explore further afield to find different types of wild birds. A trip to the Atherton Tableland will provide many different habitats containing a wide variety of birds in a relatively small area.

To meet people who are willing to help you and supply information to make your new interest more enjoyable:

- Visit Mareeba Wetlands or their website: [www.mareebawetlands.com](http://www.mareebawetlands.com)
- Join a local bird club such as Birds Australia website: [www.birdsaustralia.com.au](http://www.birdsaustralia.com.au) or email [lkfisher@optusnet.com.au](mailto:lkfisher@optusnet.com.au)

# Birds of the Wet Tropics

## GOLDEN BOWERBIRD - *Prionodura newtoniana*

This is a common resident of tropical rainforest above 700m. The male has a golden belly, golden-brown wings and facial mask. Despite his striking looks he is difficult to see in the rainforest. The female has ash-grey underparts and olive-brown wings. The male builds a maypole bower and adorns it with flowers and lichen to attract as many females as possible in the mating season. Their call is a series of croaks and rattles.

Size: 23-25cm



## VICTORIA'S RIFLEBIRD - *Ptiloris victoriae*

Victoria's Riflebird is one of Australia's four species of Birds of Paradise. Black at first glance, the male's plumage is filled with iridescent greens and blues. He attracts the duller brown females by arching his wings over his head. The call is an explosive single rasping 'yaas'.

Size: 23-25cm



## PACIFIC BAZA - *Aviceda subcristata*

This uncommon bird of prey is easily identified by its brown and white barred underbelly, greyhead, short crest and bright yellow eye. Soars above woodlands and forests hunting for food. Has a range of calls, one of which is a double descending whistle wee-choo, wee-choo.

Size: female - 46cm male - 40cm

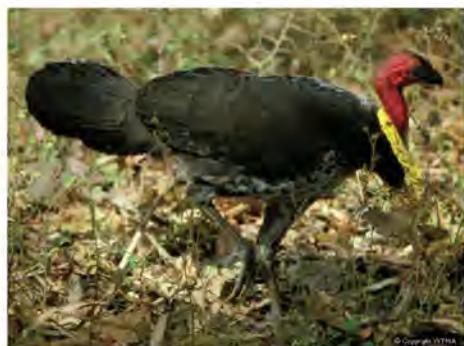


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## AUSTRALIAN BRUSH-TURKEY - *Alectura lathami*

Part of the megapode (mound builder) family, it lives in diverse habitats from the dry inland to rainforest. It noisily scratches in leaf litter, searching for insects and grunts harshly as it chases off rivals. It roosts in trees at night and its black colouration provides perfect night camouflage.

Size: 70cm



## PALE-YELLOW ROBIN - *Tregellasia capito*

This species lives in rainforests with vines and epiphytes. Often quite curious, it clings to the side of a tree or hangs from a vine to have a look at any human intruders. Two of its calls are a high pitched drawn out 'seeeeee-seee-seee' and a loud harsh 'scairr' given as an alarm call.

Size: 12.5cm



## ORANGE-FOOTED SCRUBFOWL - *Megapodius reinwardt*

The Orange-footed Scrubfowl has strong orange legs to scratch the forest floor in search of food and to scrape leaf litter onto its nest mound. These mounds can be 12m wide by 5m high, requiring leaf litter from up to 40m away. These mounds incubate the eggs which are buried deep within. If you live near the forest you have probably heard a variety of its raucous calls at night.

Size: 42-47cm



## SOUTHERN CASSOWARY - *Casuarius casuarius*

With its impressive size, glossy black plumage, tall helmet (casque) and brilliant red and blue neck with wattles, this species is easily identifiable. Adults can weigh up to 60kg. The female is larger and the male incubates the eggs and rears the striped chicks on his own. Treat with caution and do not feed.

Size: up to 2m



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## BUFF-BREASTED PARADISE-KINGFISHER - *Tanysiptera sylvia*

This kingfisher comes from New Guinea to breed in low termite mounds during the wet season. Its long ribbon-like white tail, bright red bill and legs, orange underbelly and blue wings are a spectacular sight in the rainforest. It makes a “chop-chop-chop” or a trilling call and flies swiftly through the rainforests and vine thickets.

Size: male - 36cm female - 30cm (including tail streamers)



## NOISY PITTA - *Pitta versicolor*

The Noisy Pitta is a colourful sight as it hops around the forest floor. It flicks up debris with its bill looking for insects and snails, which it cracks open on a rock anvil. Its common call is “walk-to-work” and it also has a loud high whistle “keow”, which is possibly an alarm call.

Size: 20cm Endangered



## WOMPOO FRUIT-DOVE - *Ptilinopus magnificus*

This locally common bird has a spectacular plum-purple breast, yellow underbelly, green wings with gold shoulder bar and light grey-bluehead. Its multi-colouring helps it blend perfectly into the rainforest, often making it very difficult to locate. A deep distinguishable call, “wallack-awoo”, resonates as it feeds on rainforest fruits.

Size: 35-45cm



## BLACK-NECKED STORK - *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*

The Black-necked Stork (formerly known as the Jabiru) is Australia's only stork and lives along rivers, swamps and estuaries feeding in the shallow wetlands. It has bright red legs, glossy green-black head and neck, black wings and a large bill. The male's eye is black and the female's is yellow. This elegant bird soars with neck extended and legs trailing.

Size: 115cm



# Birds of the Wet Tropics

## BLACK-SHOULDERED KITE - *Elanus axillaris*

This small white hawk shows a distinctive black shoulder patch when perched. It soars on upswept wings and hovers over grasslands and crops, with its strong yellow legs lowered, before dropping onto its prey, which are mainly rodents. It hunts mainly at dusk and dawn and occasionally on moonlit nights. The common call is "kar".

Size: 33-37cm



## BUFF-BANDED RAIL - *Gallirallus philippensis*

This water bird flicks its tail up and down when walking or swimming, showing off its black and white striped under tail. The grey eye brow and chestnut patch on the chest help separate this bird from other rails. It likes dense damp grasslands. It has a range of calls, from a squeaky "sswit sswit" to a territorial call sounding like a donkey braying.

Size: 33cm



## BUSH STONE-CURLEW - *Burhinus grallarius*

If you have ever heard a mournful wailing "wee loo" late at night then it is probably the Bush Stone-curlew. Its mottled colour provides the perfect camouflage to blend into woodland, mangrove edge and coastal garden habitats. If disturbed whilst nesting it will often lie on the ground protecting the eggs and pretending to be invisible.

Size: 55cm



## BRAHMINY KITE - *Haliastur indus*

The adult bird has a mainly chestnut body with a white head, breast and tip to the tail, plus distinctive black wing tips. This specialist fish hunter soars over coastal areas and occasionally extends inland. It perches on dead tree limbs from where its plaintive call "pee-ah-ah-ah" can be heard at dusk and dawn.

Size: 45-51cm



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## MACLEAY'S HONEYEATER - *Xanthotis macleayana*

The Macleay's Honeyeater is unique to the Wet Tropics. It has a brush tipped tongue like a paint brush for collecting nectar. You will often hear a musical "to wit, tooweeeeee twit" as it moves between flowering rainforest, mangroves and open forests.

Size: 20cm



## YELLOW-BELLIED SUNBIRD - *Nectarinia jugularis*

The male sports a bright blue/black bib and yellow belly whereas the female (pictured) has an all yellow belly. Both have a highpitched "dzit-dzit" or twittering song. It is an active, curious bird, often hovering like a hummingbird whilst drinking nectar or picking spider webs for nests. It builds a suspended nest with a side entrance, often under house eaves.

Size: 12cm



## RAINBOW LORIKEET - *Trichoglossus haematodus*

The most common lorikeet in the Wet Tropics, it feeds on the nectar of trees and shrubs. It becomes drunk on the nectar and often hangs upside down in the trees or even falls to the ground. Its continual screeching and chattering is easily heard in open coastal forests.

Size: 28cm



## RAINBOW BEE-EATER - *Ducula bicolor*

Found throughout Australia, this brightlycoloured bird breeds in Australia during summer, nesting in tunnels burrowed into riverbanks, road cuttings, sand dunes and cliffs. The southern populations then pass through the Wet Tropics area on their way to New Guinea and Indonesia for the winter.

Size: 28cm



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## PIED-IMPERIAL PIGEON - *Merops ornatus*

This large pigeon migrates between Papua New Guinea and the rainforests of north Queensland. Between September and March they breed on predator-free islands off the Wet Tropics coast, flying back to the mainland to feed on rainforest fruits. Its deep "coo-woo" is a common sound during the wet season.

Size: 44cm



## AZURE KINGFISHER - *Alcedo azurea*

This colourful kingfisher has a single highpitched whistle which is often the first sign of its presence as it flies swiftly along rivers, creeks and through mangroves. It will land on an overhanging branch before diving for fish.

Size: 18cm

