

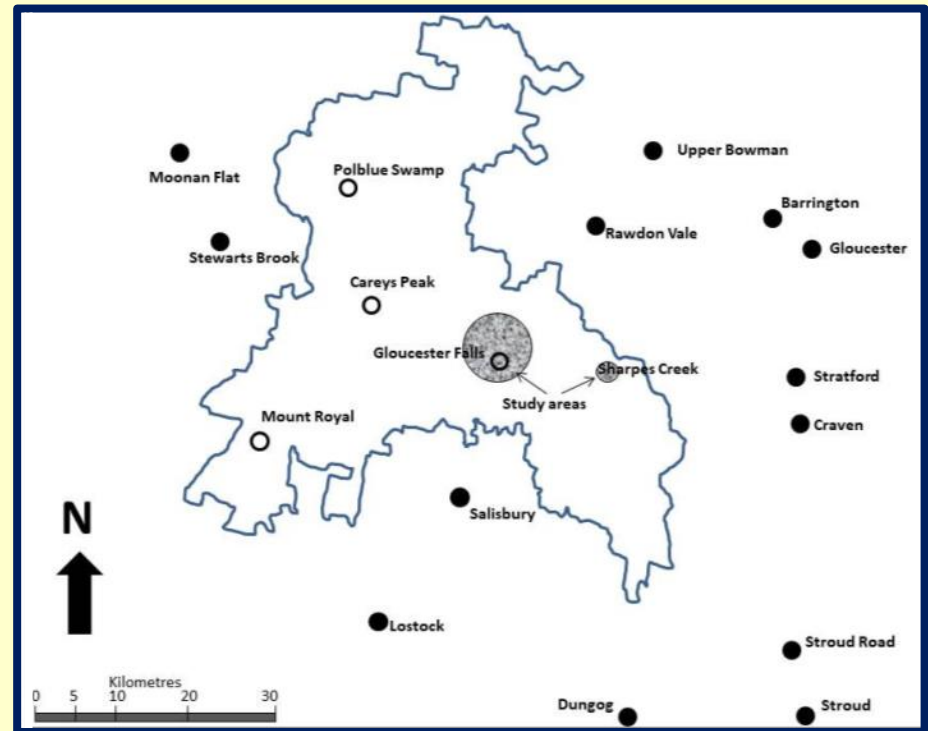
Birds of the Gloucester Tops



Alan Stuart
October 2019

Birds of the Gloucester Tops

- Low altitude birds
- On the climb
- High altitude birds
- High altitude specialists



Data sources

- Spring surveys by HBOC members since 2010
- My personal records
- Birdata (national database)

About the Gloucester Tops

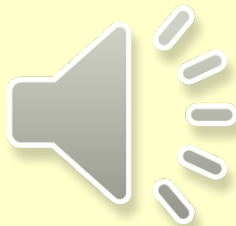
- Part of the Barrington Tops National Park
 - Celebrating 50 Year Anniversary next month
 - Some areas formerly logged
- Part of Gondwana Rainforests World Heritage Area
- Part of Barrington Tops & Gloucester Tops KBA (Key Biodiversity Area)
 - Based on presence of 7 rare or range-restricted bird species
- Much of the Gloucester Tops is at altitudes of $> 1,000\text{m}$



Superb Lyrebird
(southern limit of northern subspecies)

Owls and other night birds

- Not often found in our daytime surveys!
- Southern Boobook and Tawny Frogmouth are often heard around the campsite
- Masked Owls and Greater Sooty Owls sometimes heard or seen at higher altitudes
- Powerful Owls are present at mid and high altitudes

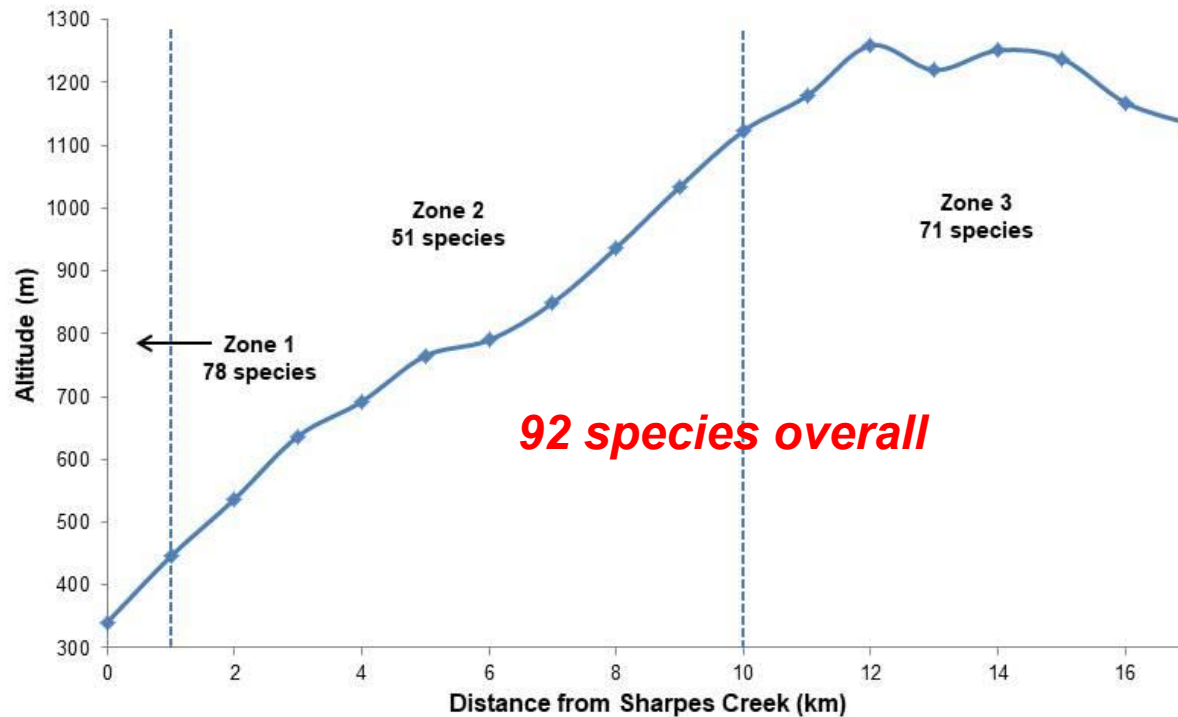


Powerful Owl calls (female, male)



Powerful Owl (photo: Gary Tong)

Three survey zones



Far more survey effort at high altitude (80% of surveys)

Gloucester Tops habitat

High altitude

- A mosaic: patches of eucalyptus open woodland and Antarctic Beech rainforest
- Some areas of Snow Gum
- Woodlands: Dense understorey at 0.5-1.0m and very dense understorey at <20cm



Open woodland with dense understorey

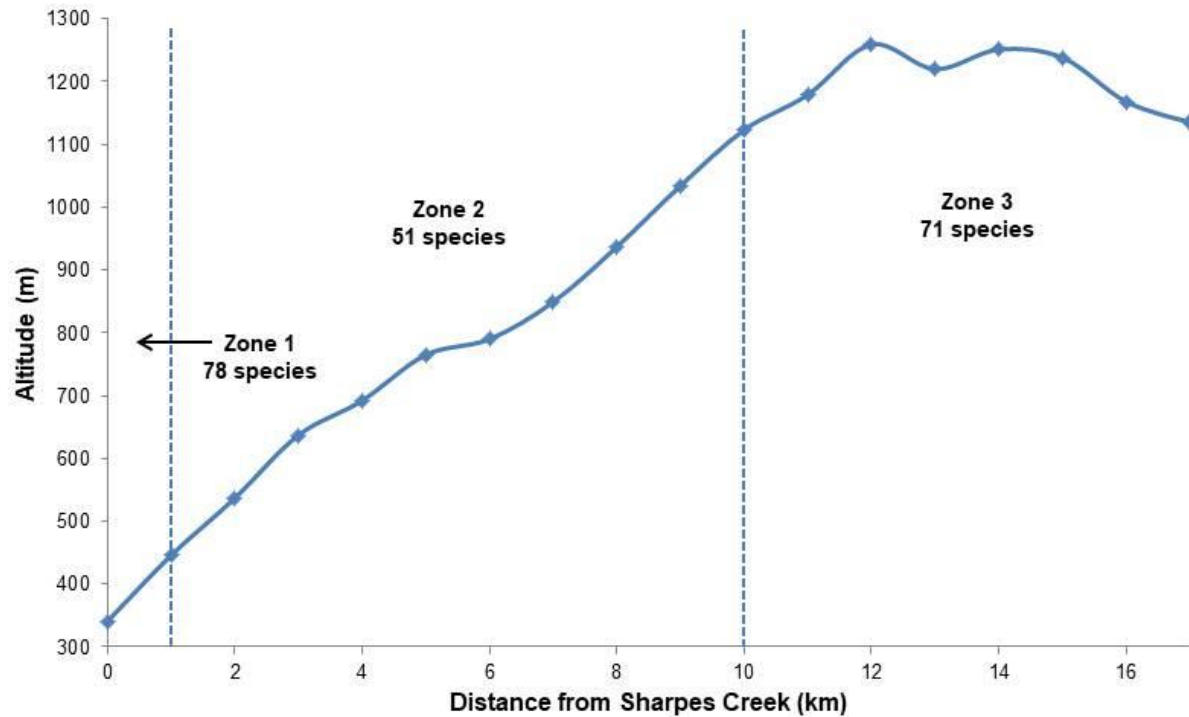
Low altitude

- Temperate rainforest, riparian areas, grassy picnic area

Mid altitude

- Eucalypt woodland interspersed with temperate rainforest

Birds at low altitude



Around the Sharpes Creek campsite

- 78 species
- 1 threatened species: Glossy Black-Cockatoo
- 11 summer migrants



Glossy Black-Cockatoos (photo: Rob Palazzi)

Some summer migrants



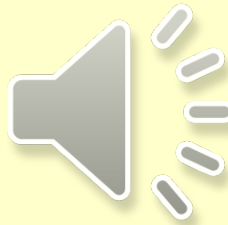
Noisy Pitta (photo: Alwyn Simple)



Black-faced Monarch (photo: Rob Palazzi)



Spectacled Monarch (photo: Lorna Mee)



Noisy Pitta



Rose Robin (at all altitudes)

Some low altitude specialists



Green Catbird



Brush-turkey (photo: Ray Burton)



Superb Fairy-wrens (photo: Jim Thomson)



Green Catbird

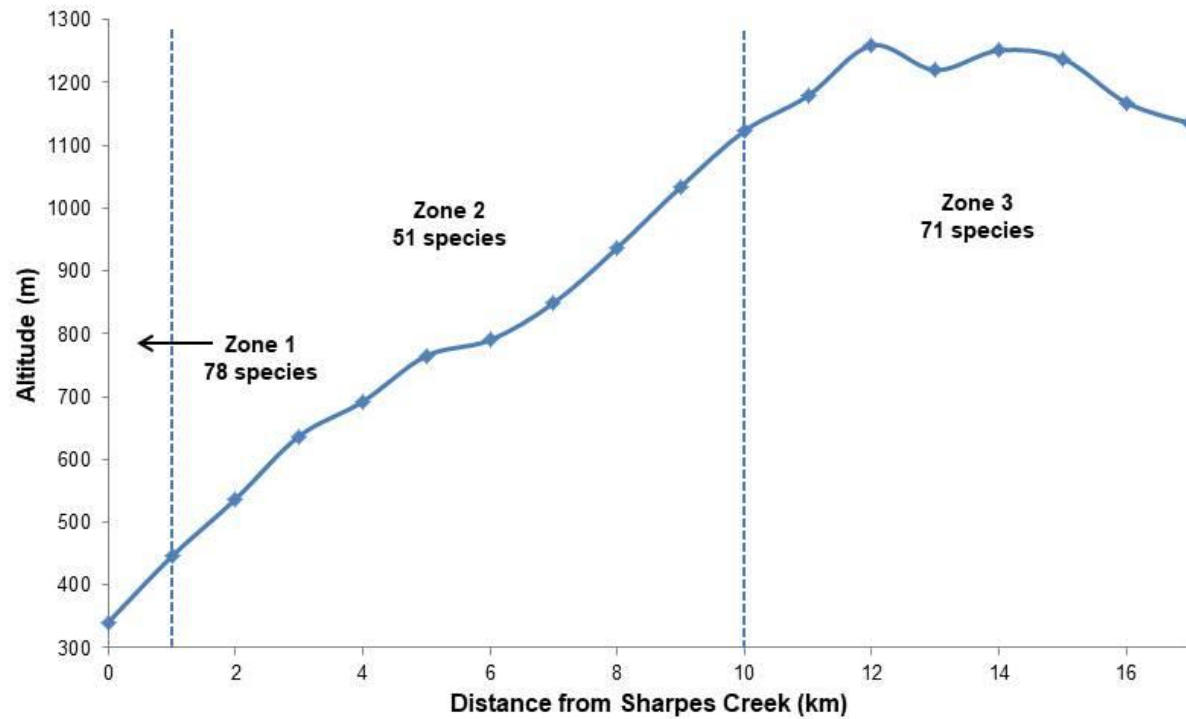


Red-browed Finch (photo: Rob Palazzi)



Australian Raven (photo: Jim Smart)

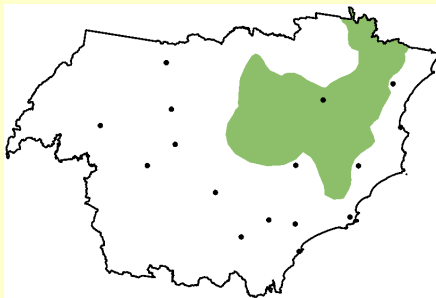
The 400m – 1100m zone



Mid altitude specialists



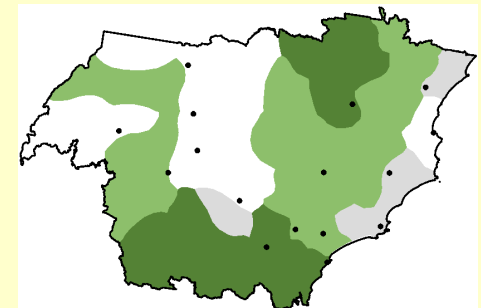
Paradise Riflebird (photo: Rob Palazzi)



Paradise Riflebird

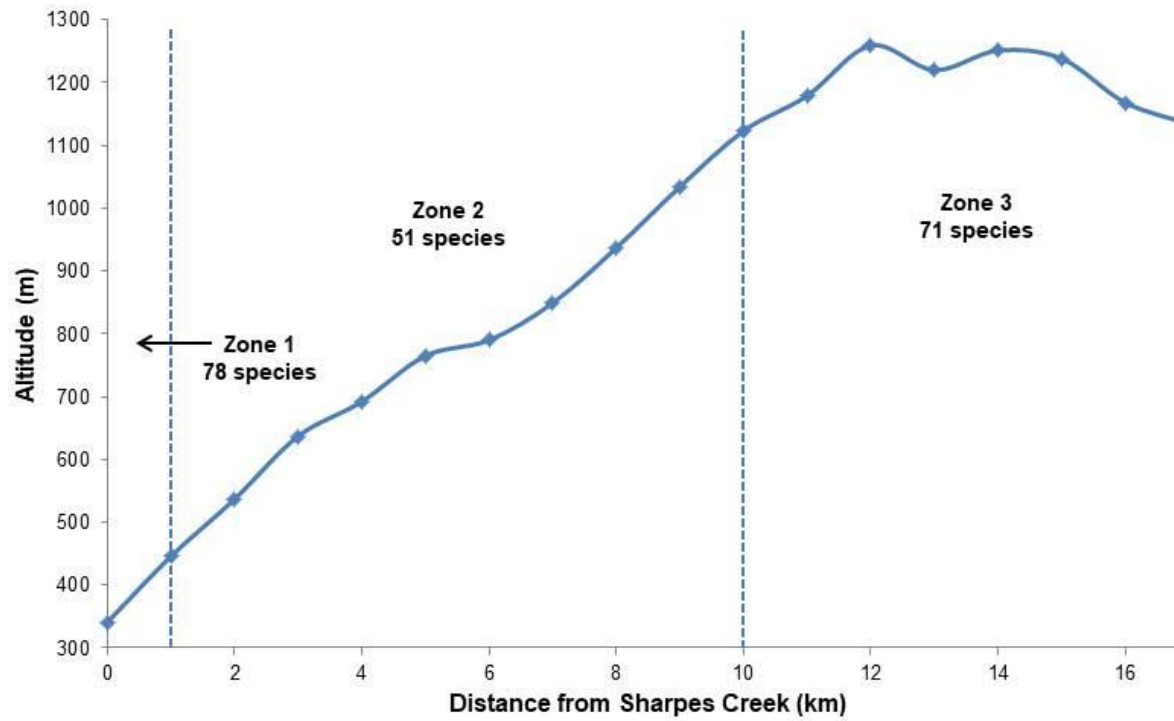


Bell Miner (photo: Chris Herbert)



***The distribution driver is habitat, not altitude!
There are low altitude locations elsewhere in our region.***

Birds at high altitude



The high altitude areas

- 71 species
- 6 threatened species
- 7 summer migrants
- Summer altitudinal migrant (Bassian Thrush)
- Autumn honeyeater influx
- Five feature birds
 - Difficult or impossible to find elsewhere in the Hunter Region



Bassian Thrush

Honeyeaters in autumn

- Yellow-faced Honeyeaters and Eastern Spinebills
 - Common all year at high altitude
 - Numbers swell in April-May when *Banksias* are in prolific flower
- Maye New Holland Honeyeaters arrive
 - Also, smaller numbers of other honeyeaters



Yellow-faced Honeyeater



New Holland
Honeyeater

Annual autumn mass migration passage in lower Hunter of honeyeaters from southern Australia, dominated by Yellow-faced Honeyeaters.

The Gloucester Tops influx may involve a more localised movement.

Threatened species at high altitude



Rufous Scrub-bird



Flame Robin



Crescent
Honeyeater



Scarlet Robin



Olive Whistler



Varied Sittella

Photos: David Stowe, Rob Palazzi (x 4), Alwyn Simple

Five feature birds

- Rufous Scrub-bird
- Crescent Honeyeater
- Olive Whistler
- Red-browed Treecreeper
- Flame Robin

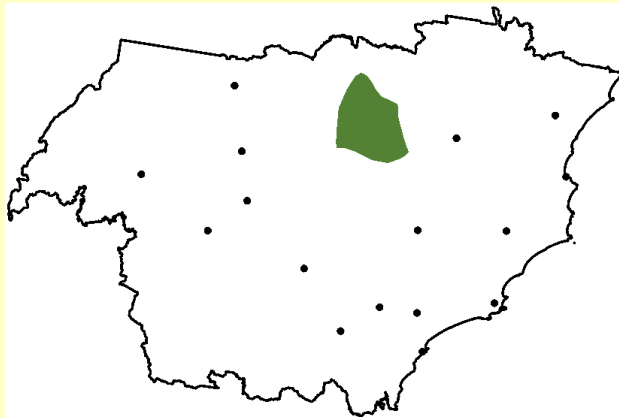


Red-browed Treecreeper (photo: Rob Palazzi)

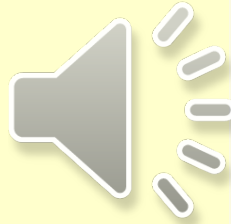
Rufous Scrub-bird



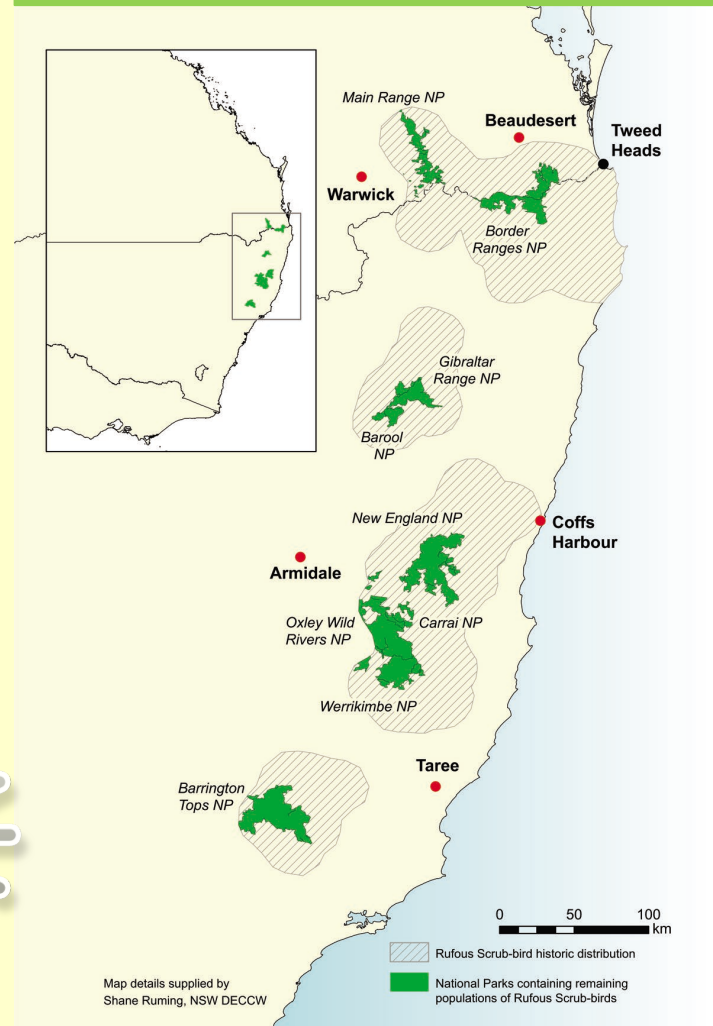
Photo: Allan Richardson



Distribution in Hunter Region



Current & former range

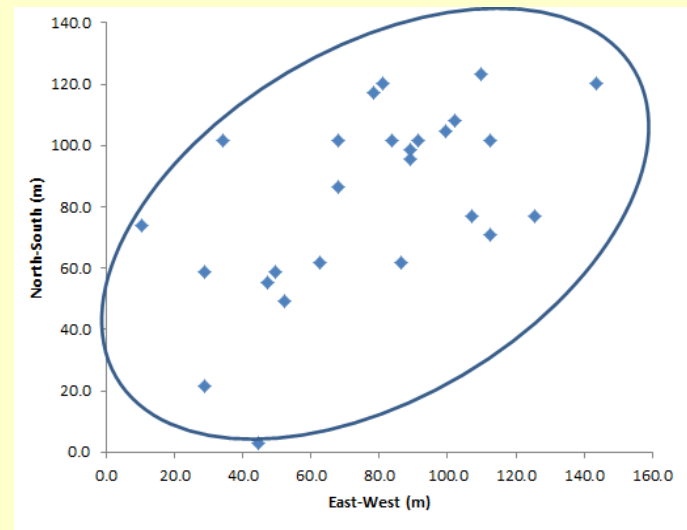


What we know about scrub-birds?

- Population stable in core habitat in the Gloucester Tops
 - Annual monitoring in Spring since 2010
 - ~4km radius site, ~5,000ha
 - 37 territories identified (~55% long-term occupancy)
- Birds not present at former territories below ~1,000m
- Singing areas are small (0.8-1.5 ha)



One of the spring survey teams



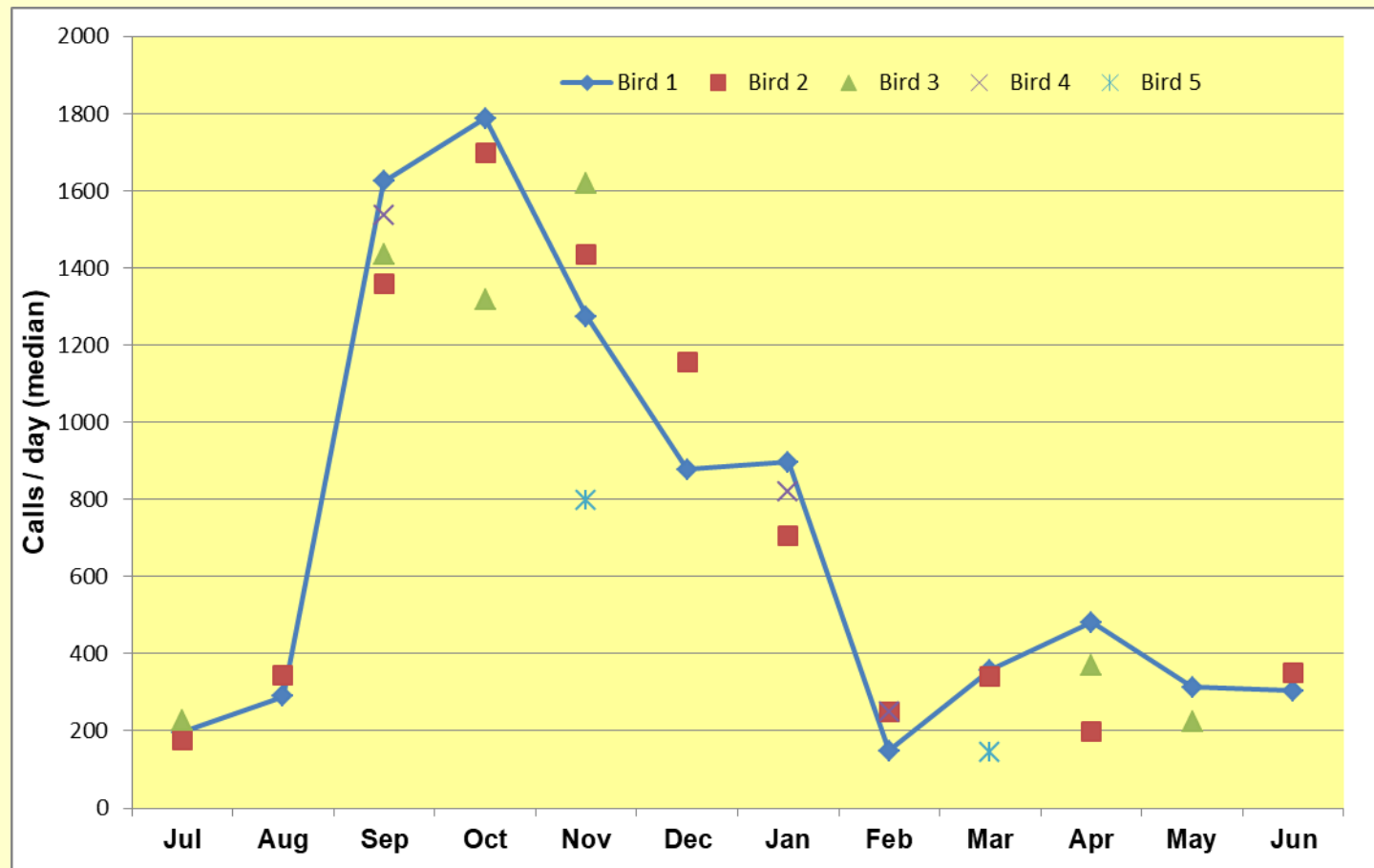
Locations within a singing area

What don't we know about scrub-birds?

- What are their specific habitat requirements?
- How long do they live?
- Are the males polygamous?
- Where are the females' territories?
- How do males and females interact?
- How do males and other males interact?
- What does a nest look like for the southern sub-species?
- What time of the year do they breed?
- What happens to the young birds?
- How do they cope with predators?



How often does a Scrub-bird sing?



- 1000-1800 calls / day from mid-Sep for ~ 3 months
- Behaviours were similar for 5 individual Scrub-birds

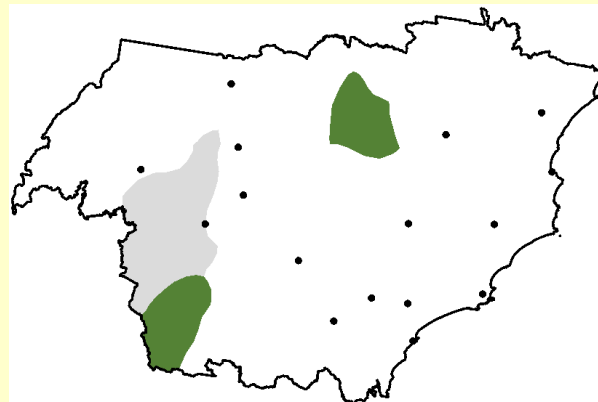
Crescent Honeyeater



- Records from Barrington Tops / Gloucester Tops and Mt Coricudgy
- Associated with *Banksia*
- Some evidence for winter movement to lower altitudes?
- Breeding has never been recorded locally



Crescent Honeyeater



Distribution in
Hunter Region

Olive Whistler

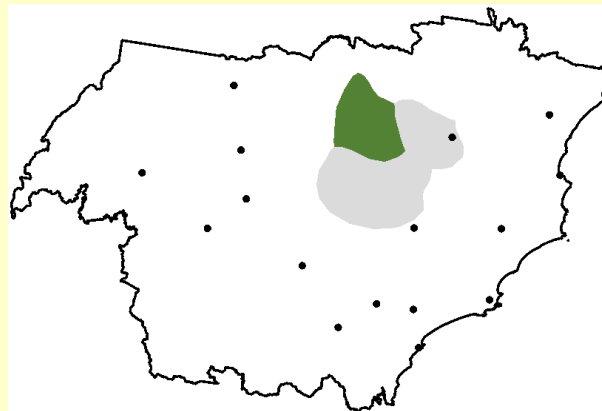


Olive Whistler (photo: Rob Palazzi)



Olive Whistler

- Records from Barrington Tops / Gloucester Tops
- Associated with Beech forest
- Some evidence for winter movement to lower altitudes??
- Breeding has never been recorded locally



Distribution in
Hunter Region

Flame Robin



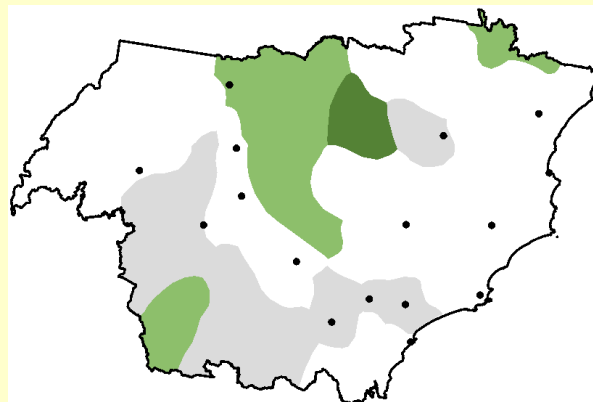
- Summer records from Barrington Tops / Gloucester Tops and Mt Coricudgy
- Winter movement to lower altitudes
- Regular breeding records in the Gloucester Tops



Timeline for low altitude records



Flame Robin



Distribution in
Hunter Region

Red-browed Treecreeper

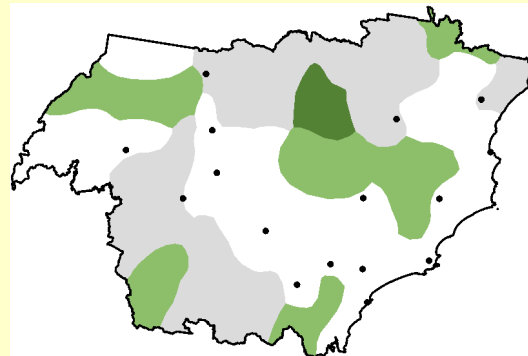


Photo: Rob Palazzi



Red-browed
Treecreeper

- Has the widest distribution of the “big 5” species
 - Gloucester Tops the most convenient and reliable location
- Gloucester Tops breeding records
- Chatty and gregarious (unlike White-throated Treecreeper)
 - Territorial pairs can have 2-3 permanent helpers



Distribution in
Hunter Region

Deserving special mention



Lewin's Rail



Satin Flycatcher
(photo: George Voss)

Lewin's Rail

- Uncommon waterbird at coastal wetlands
- Several Gloucester Tops records!

Satin Flycatcher

- Rare summer migrant to high altitude areas

In conclusion

- 92 species recorded over 2010-2019
 - 71 of those species recorded at high altitude
- Possibly another c.10 uncommon species are present?
 - The ongoing survey work often turns up another “new” species
- Gloucester Tops hosts several threatened species
- Five of the high altitude species are “feature birds” for local birdwatchers
 - Easy to find them in the Gloucester Tops
 - Difficult or impossible to find elsewhere
- They are home for the endangered Rufous Scrub-bird

Thanks for coming tonight!

If you want to know more

- www.thinkingaboutbirds.com
- www.hboc.org.au

Acknowledgements

- 40+ members of HBOC (spring surveys)
- Mike Newman, Margaret O'Leary
- NPWS Gloucester office
- Numerous photographers
- Distribution maps: Dan Williams