Birds of the Gloucester Tops

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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 > 1,000m

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

92 species overall

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

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)

Spectacled Monarch (photo: Lorna Mee)

Black-faced Monarch (photo: Rob Palazzi)

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

- Zone 1: 78 species
- Zone 2: 51 species
- Zone 3: 71 species
Mid altitude specialists

Paradise Riflebird (photo: Rob Palazzi)

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

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
Varied Sittella
Scarlet Robin
Olive Whistler

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

Current & former range

Distribution in Hunter Region

Photo: Allan Richardson
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
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

Olive Whistler (photo: Rob Palazzi)

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

Distribution in Hunter Region
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
Deserving special mention

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