

COASTAL BIRDS

of the Burdekin Dry Tropics



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Introduction

Burdekin Dry Tropics Natural Resource Management (BDTNRM) and the Townsville Regional Bird Observers Club (TRBOC) have co-produced *Coastal Birds of the Burdekin Dry Tropics*, with assistance by elders from the Juru (Burdekin-Bowen) and the Manbarra (Palm Island) Traditional Owner groups who have kindly shared their cultural values associated with these coastal birds. This book was developed to help local residents identify the birds that inhabit our beaches, estuaries and marine environments and help protect them. It is hoped that by reading this booklet, you will develop an awareness of our coastal birds that include threatened, rare and endangered species and in doing so, reduce the threats to these birds and understand the cultural values these birds have to our Traditional Owners.

You could be forgiven for assuming there is plenty of room on the coast for both humans and birds. Not without sensible management it seems. According to the organisation Shorebirds 2020 (www.shorebirds.org.au), "there is increasing evidence that migratory shorebird populations throughout the world are declining."

The coast of the Burdekin Dry Tropics spans from Crystal Creek in the north to Bowen in the south. With its vast coastline, estuaries and wetlands, the Burdekin Dry Tropics region hosts numerous species of migratory shorebirds and various other coastal species of which we have selected only a few to showcase their diversity. All of these birds can be found within three kilometres of the beach, and many of them in your own backyard. Simply put, many of the birds we share our coastline with are threatened and weary global travellers stopping to rest and feed on their annual migration routes.

As the human population increases, the overlap between human coastal activities and shorebird habitat intensifies. The subsequent loss and degradation of breeding, feeding and roosting habitats for shorebirds through coastal development and human-related disturbance is threatening our shorebird populations. The Burdekin coastline includes numerous coastal communities and beaches that are inhabited by both birds and people. Look out for these birds at Balgal Beach, Acheron, Mystic Sands, Toomulla, Toolakea, Bushland Beach, Cungulla, Alva Beach, Wunjunga, Kings Beach, the Strand and Rowes Bay.

Coastal development, dogs, rubbish and vehicles can all threaten bird life in the Burdekin Dry Tropics coastal zone. Take for example the driving of motor vehicles on coastal dunes and foreshores – these are also the fragile nesting areas of many shorebirds. The very presence of vehicles will result in some species deserting their nesting sites. Unrestrained dogs chasing birds along the flats is very harmful and is particularly damaging in the weeks prior to migration when the birds need to fatten



up for the long journey ahead. Litter (including plastics, bait bags and tangled fishing line) can be a life threatening hazard to birds and other marine life. Under particular threat from human disturbance to our northern beaches are the Beach Stone-curlew (ref page 22) and the Little Tern (ref page 30). While both birds are protected under legislation, their numbers are in serious decline due to the disturbance of their nesting sites during their breeding seasons.

Please do what you can to protect birds on our beaches. Whether nesting, feeding or resting, all shorebirds are under serious threat from vehicles, dogs, rubbish and coastal development so keep this in mind. Your choices determine their futures.





Pacific Black Duck

Anas superciliosa

DESCRIPTION:

Size 47-61cm. Dark brown duck with light scalloping on wings. Blackish crown, buff face with a dark line through the eye and a chin strap. Iridescent blue/green wing panel and white under wing with dark trailing edges noticeable in flight. Feet and legs yellow/green.

FEEDING HABITS:

Dabbling duck (head down-tail up). Aquatic insects and larvae, seeds and floating vegetation (taken from or just below the water surface).

BREEDING:

Nest is a down-lined tree hollow or grass cup in dense grass or reeds. They occasionally use old nests of other water birds. They breed Jan-April, incubation 20 days. The female is the only carer.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Wetlands, rivers, roadside ponds, freshwater and brackish swamps, parks and tidal mudflats.

THREATS:

Continuing drainage of swamps. Interbreeding with the introduced Mallard may lessen its ability to survive droughts.



Pied Cormorant

Phalacrocorax varius

DESCRIPTION:

Size 70-75cm. General plumage is black above (often looks iridescent) and white underneath. Black flank is noticeable when perched. Legs and feet black. A long bone coloured hooked bill. Conspicuous orange-yellow eye patch and blue eye-ring. Pale flesh coloured bare skin on the throat.

FEEDING HABITS:

Feed mainly on fish along with crustaceans and molluscs which they catch by diving down and swimming underwater. These birds are often seen on a perch with their wings spread out to dry.

BREEDING:

Breed in colonies at any time, depending on food supply. After pairing, both birds gather dry or green sticks for the bulky platform nest which is sometimes lined with leaves or waterweed. Both birds share in incubating the eggs and care for the young.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Coastal regions, lakes, rivers, mangroves, beaches and wetland areas.



Little Egret

Egretta garzetta

DESCRIPTION:

Size 55-65cm. Fine, small, all white egret. Long neck, black legs. Slender bill always black with part-yellow base and bright yellow facial skin. Breeding plumage: two long, fine plumes trailing from the back of the head with fine lacy plumes on breast, and over the back.

FEEDING HABITS:

Feed on small fish, crustaceans, aquatic insects and other small water creatures. Usually forage in shallow open waters, swamps, billabongs, mudflats and mangroves. The only egret that runs about when feeding, lifting its wings to startle prey. Sometimes rakes the water with a foot.

BREEDING:

Breed in colonies, often with other waterbirds in trees over fresh water, or in mangroves. Nest is a rough platform of sticks up to 45cm across. Parents share nest building, incubation and care for the young.



Manbarra
Traditional Owner
Value

LANGUAGE NAME:
Idalia

MEANING:
Food resources
are plentiful

STORY:
When there are egrets
it means that seafood
is plentiful, especially
julguile and coucal shells.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Swamps, billabongs,
shallow pools and tidal
flats.



Eastern Great Egret

Ardea modesta

DESCRIPTION:

Size 83-100cm. Tall, graceful, extremely long-necked white bird with long black legs and feet. Bill and facial skin are yellow with a dark line extending from the base of the bill to behind the eye. In flight legs extend well beyond the tail and the neck has an abrupt kink. The wing beats are slow and deliberate. During breeding the bill turns mostly black and the facial skin becomes green/blue around the eyes, legs turn reddish. Long lacy plumes are grown across the lower back.

FEEDING HABITS:

Usually feed alone, standing motionless or slowly stalking fish, frogs and insects in shallow water.

BREEDING:

Nest in colonies with other waterbirds, on a large rough platform of sticks in tall trees standing in or near water.

Manbarra
Traditional Owner
Value

LANGUAGE NAME:

Idalia

MEANING:

Food resources are plentiful

STORY

When there are egrets it mean that seafood is plentiful, especially julguile and coucal shells.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Fresh water wetlands, rivers and mudflats.

THREATS:

Many breeding colonies have been lost as a result of clearing and filling of swamps.



Striated Heron

Butorides striata

DESCRIPTION:

Size 45-50cm. This waterbird is often seen near the water's edge or skulking through mangroves (in fact its other name is Mangrove Heron). It has a distinct black cap, blue-grey or greenish body with dark streaks, a long dagger-like bill and yellow legs.

FEEDING HABITS:

Striated Herons roost in low branches at high tide, often diving down into the water for fish. As the tide goes out, they fly out to mudflats and settle to slowly stalk their prey, almost horizontal to the ground. They feed on small fish, crabs, shellfish, insects and especially mudskippers.

BREEDING:

In summer a pair build a platform of sticks in the mangroves. Both parents brood and then feed the young.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Fairly common among mangroves, intertidal flats, creeks and shore lines. Often difficult to see as they are well camouflaged and often 'freeze' before moving cautiously to stab their prey. Toomulla, Plantation and Molongle Creeks.



Australian White Ibis

Threskiornis molucca

DESCRIPTION:

Size 65-75cm. Mainly white with bare black head and neck. Long downward curved black bill. Black lace-like feathers over the tail. Plumage often soiled. Black tips to wings noticeable in flight. Legs red/dark grey. During breeding: stiff pale yellow breast plumes and bare red skin underwing.

FEEDING HABITS:

Feed on crickets, earthworms, insects, snails and frogs. Often seen probing in the soil or under water. They have become scavengers around people.

BREEDING:

Breed over water in established colonies which are used for several years. The male collects the branches and the female constructs a platform nest. Both birds share in incubating the eggs and care for the young.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Mangroves, fresh water, brackish and saline wetlands, beaches, parks, gardens and rubbish dumps. There is a breeding colony at South Townsville National Park opposite the boat ramp.

THREATS:

Many breeding colonies have been lost as a result of clearing and filling of swamps.



Eastern Osprey

Pandion cristatus

DESCRIPTION:

Size 50-65cm. A medium sized raptor, dark brown on the upper parts and white underneath with a dark band through the eye to the back of the neck. The female is a little larger than the male and has a brown streaked breast band.

FEEDING HABITS:

Feed on live fish. They swoop headlong into the water, talons forward to grasp the fish, often going under the water to do so. They retire to a safe perch to tear the fish up and devour it.

BREEDING:

Often return to the same nesting site year after year. The nest is made of large sticks. Nests can be on cliffs or tall trees in the natural environment. In the built environment they can be on transmission towers or artificial platforms that have been built to replace trees cut down in developments.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Rivers, dams, Bushland and Toolakea Beaches. There is a nest in a transmission tower near Ross River Dam.

THREATS:

Clearing of suitable nesting trees.



Black Kite

Milvus migrans

DESCRIPTION:

Size 47-55cm. Easily identified when perched or in flight by its forked tail. It is uniformly dark brown with a yellow area around the nostrils (cere) and a wingspan of 120-140cm. Young birds are lighter in colour with a more streaked and spotted appearance.

FEEDING HABITS:

Food scraps scavenged from camping grounds and picnic areas. They can often be seen in very large numbers in slow circling flight over rubbish dumps. Bushfires are another source of food as they circle waiting to prey upon small mammals, lizards, and insects – especially grasshoppers as they flee the flames.

BREEDING:

A large platform of sticks, lined with wool, fur or dry vegetation, usually high within the canopy. The female sits on the eggs and the male provides food. After fledging, the young rely on the parents for about two months.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Beaches, tidal flats, rubbish dumps or patrolling roadsides looking for "roadkill".



Brahminy Kite

Haliastur indus

DESCRIPTION:

Size 45-51cm. Head, breast, and neck white. Shoulders, back, belly and tail rich chestnut, open wings tipped black. Reddish brown eyes, pale bone coloured bill and cream feet. Juvenile is mottled brown.

FEEDING HABITS:

Feed on fish, often relying on fish stranded or cast up by the tide. Offal and scraps are part of the diet along with frogs, crabs and insects. Most food is eaten on the ground but is sometimes taken to a perch to be devoured.

BREEDING:

Pairing only to breed, they build a bulky nest of sticks in mangroves or other suitable trees. The female does most of the incubating while the male hunts and brings her food. When the chicks are big enough, both parents hunt and drop food at the nest for them to feed on.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Coastal foreshores, mangrove lined creeks and inlets.

THREATS:

Clearing of suitable nesting trees.



White-bellied Sea Eagle

Haliaeetus leucogaster

DESCRIPTION:

Size 70-85cm. Adult white head and body, dark grey wings and back, short white wedge shaped tail, dark at the base. Juvenile; mottled brown and buff, tail whitish with black band. When soaring, wings are up-curved.

FEEDING HABITS:

Food includes mammals, tortoises, sea-snakes, fish, juvenile ducks and swans. May also be seen flying slowly over foreshores searching for offal and carrion left by the tide.

BREEDING:

Always near water in large trees, the nest is a huge pile of sticks lined with seaweed and leaves, often up to 30m above ground. Built by both sexes and often used over several years. Female does most of the incubating and brooding, and is fed by the male.

Manbarra
Traditional Owner
Value

LANGUAGE NAME:
Gudhala

MEANING:
Location

STORY:
This bird in the Manbarra language represents Phantom Island point in the group of Palm Islands.

PLACES TO LOOK:
Along foreshores, large rivers and swamps. Often perched conspicuously on a high limb that gives a good view of the surroundings. Lake Ross and Toomulla are good sites.

THREATS:
Clearing of suitable nesting trees.



Bar-tailed Godwit

Limosa lapponica

DESCRIPTION:

Size 38-45cm. Large pale grey/brown migratory wader, with a long slightly upturned bill which is black with a pink base. Breast pale grey/brown, belly white, tail white with fine brown bars. Sides are pale grey/brown streaked with dark brown. Long dark grey legs. Underwing is heavily barred. When flying away, it shows a white rump and finely barred tail.

FEEDING HABITS:

Uses its long bill to probe for marine worms, crabs and aquatic insects.

BREEDING:

Nests in the Arctic from Scandinavia to Alaska. Sometimes we see the males colouring up for breeding prior to departure from March-April. His head, neck and undersides are rufous (reddish – brown). Female is duller. Some birds stay in this region over the winter period.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Mudflats, estuaries, edges of lakes, swamps and sandbars. Check Bushland Beach or the mudflats at the end of Boundary Street, South Townsville.

THREATS:

Reclamation of mudflats for development takes away suitable feeding habitat.



Eastern Curlew

Numenius madagascariensis

DESCRIPTION:

Size 53-65cm. The largest migratory wader in Australia. Upper parts are sandy with darker streaks on head and neck. Wings heavily mottled/streaked dark brown. Tail has dark bars. Underparts grey/buff with breast paling to whitish on belly. The extremely long bill is 3.5-4 times the length of the head, and is down turned, black, with a reddish base. It has a pale eye ring. The legs are grey and longer than the tail in flight.

FEEDING HABITS:

Active at low tide and during the night, using its long bill to probe in the mud/sand for marine worms and crabs.

BREEDING:

Nest on mossy marshes in Russia and North Eastern China. Some birds stay in this region over the winter period.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Coastal mudflats, sandy beaches, mangroves and estuaries, Kings Beach, Bowen. Balgal, and the mudflats at the end of Boundary Street South Townsville.

THREATS:

Reclamation of mudflats for development takes away suitable feeding habitat.



Common Greenshank

Tringa nebularia

DESCRIPTION:

Size 30-35cm. A reasonably large pale wader with a long dark slightly upturned bill. Legs are green/yellow. The back is a brown/grey and the head and neck are flecked with grey. The underparts are white. The call, a loud "tew tew tew" when taking flight, along with the extensive white "V" on the rump and back help to identify this wader.

FEEDING HABITS:

Usually alone or in pairs, they probe along the water edge for worms, crustaceans, aquatic insects and small fish.

BREEDING:

A migratory wader that flies back to the northern hemisphere to breed, anywhere from Scotland across to Siberia. In Australia they need to fatten up for the long migration north which takes place in March-April. This is why it is important that unrestrained dogs do not disturb their feeding.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Mudflats along the coast, swamps and estuaries. Check Bushland Beach, Cungulla or Muller's Lagoon, Bowen.

THREATS:

Unrestrained dogs disturbing feeding before migration.



Grey-tailed Tattler

Tringa brevipes

DESCRIPTION:

Size 24-27cm. Medium sized migratory wader returning to this region September-April. Washed slate grey on the back, grey breast, paler throat, rest of underparts white. White eyebrow extending behind the eye, straight tapering grey bill with a yellowish base and dark line from the bill through the eye. Legs yellowish. Often seen singly or in small groups.

FEEDING HABITS:

Probes in the mud or sand for crabs, marine worms, small fish and aquatic insects. When disturbed flies away but often returns to the same spot, bobbing and teetering while feeding.

BREEDING:

They breed in the remote mountains of Eastern Siberia. Some birds stay in this region over the winter period.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Found on tidal mudflats and sandbars, estuaries, mangroves, rocky shores and reefs. Bushland Beach, Balgal, Cungulla, Abbot Point and Dalrymple Point.

THREATS:

Reclamation of mudflats for development takes away suitable feeding habitat.



Red-necked Stint

Calidris ruficollis

DESCRIPTION:

Size 15cm. Migrating to Australia from North East Siberia, August-April. Grey/brown above, underparts white, with grey wash on sides of chest. Bill and legs black. In breeding plumage (just before migration March-April), deep salmon/rufous (reddish – brown) on head and throat merging into black indistinct band on chest. Often in large flocks along the foreshore. Size and feeding action are the best way to identify this small wader.

FEEDING HABITS:

Active feeder, like “a run – stop – sewing machine” picking over, and into the mud and sand for marine worms, tiny crustaceans, snails and aquatic insects.

BREEDING:

Some birds do stay all year, but most migrate to North East Siberia to breed in the Arctic tundra.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Sandspits, estuaries, saline or brackish mudflats, tidal flats, and sometimes shallow mud-edged swamps. Cungulla, Alva, Balgal and Bowen beaches.

THREATS:

Reclamation of mudflats for development takes away feeding grounds.



Bush Stone-curlew

Burhinus grallarius

DESCRIPTION:

Size 55-59cm. Well camouflaged and secretive, often difficult to see. Freeze flat on the ground to avoid detection. Body mid grey-brown heavily streaked with black and pale wing-band. White eyebrow with a dusky stripe through the eye and down the side of the neck. Large yellow eyes, black bill, long legs and feet are olive/yellow. The call is an eerie nocturnal wailing.

FEEDING HABITS:

Mainly feed at night. The birds wander along, turning over litter and picking up a variety of insects.

BREEDING:

Nest on bare ground, often near a bush or tree or beside a fallen dead limb or a place that their eggs blend in with. Both parents incubate the eggs.

Juru

Traditional Owner Value

LANGUAGE NAME:

Eungie Wula Dibala

MEANING:

Death or big trouble

STORY:

This bird has a low pitch screech to start off with, then, as the singing becomes louder we take notice if there are any other birds joining in.

If there are three or more birds singing with the curlew and the singing is loud and close by it means big trouble is coming your way.

If there is only one curlew screeching in a low pitch and it comes inside your yard or near your house, that means you will hear about the death of a family member or close friend.

PLACES TO LOOK:

They inhabit open-grassed woodlands, golf courses, parks and gardens. Can be seen in groups of up to 20 when not breeding.

THREATS:

Habitats destroyed by housing developments. Many young birds killed by cars, dogs and cats.



Beach Stone-curlew

Esacus magnirostris

DESCRIPTION:

Size 55-56cm. Shy, large, heavy looking bird, with thick black and yellow bill. Bold black line through the eye, with white bands above and below. Black and white shoulder bar. Grey/brown body. Large yellow eyes, yellow/green legs. The black and white at the wing tips are obvious in flight.

FEEDING HABITS:

Feed late afternoon when the tide is low, foraging on exposed intertidal mudflats and sand spits for crabs and other invertebrates.

BREEDING:

No nest is made. Mostly one egg is laid on sand or amongst flotsam and grasses usually beneath a bush or tree above the high tide mark. Once the young have hatched both parents look after them until they reach 7 -12 months.



Manbarra
Traditional Owner
Value

LANGUAGE NAME:
Tooaninnie

MEANING:
Death in the close family group.

STORY:
This bird represents death. The curlew is a specific sign that there will be a death of someone in the close family group.

PLACES TO LOOK:
Confined to beaches, mudflats, river mouths and mangroves.

THREATS:
Nests and young are vulnerable to roaming dogs, feral cats and vehicles on the beach.



Australian Pied Oystercatcher

Haematopus longirostris

DESCRIPTION:

Size 42-50cm. Attractive, conspicuous dumpy black and white wader. Black except for white rump which is noticeable in flight. Underparts are white. Straight bright red/orange bill, red eye, short bright pink/red legs. Usually seen in pairs or small groups. The call is a piping trill in flight.

FEEDING HABITS:

The blade like bill is well suited for prising apart bivalve shells and probing for marine worms and molluscs.

BREEDING:

Prefer a site with a wide uninterrupted view. Nest July-January above the high tide mark in a scrape on sand or in seaweed or pebbles often near driftwood. Two to three cream speckled brown eggs. Both parents share in raising the young which leave the nest within days of hatching.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Sandy beaches, mudflats, sandspits, inlets and bays. Seldom seen along rocky shorelines.

THREATS:

Feeding, roosting and nesting birds are vulnerable to unrestrained dogs, feral cats, beach vehicles.



Red-capped Plover

Charadrius ruficapillus

DESCRIPTION:

Size 14-16cm. Resident shorebird. Male has a white forehead with rufous crown and neck, a fine black bill with adjoining black line that continues through the eye. Brown back, black legs and underparts white. The female has less distinctive markings.

FEEDING HABITS:

Can be seen foraging on beaches and mudflats for insects, molluscs, worms, small crustaceans and vegetation.

BREEDING:

Breed at any time of the year, usually above the high tide mark whenever conditions are suitable. The nest is a shallow scrape in sand or bare ground, sometimes protected by rubbish or a small plant, lined with small pebbles, shells or dried plant material. Both parents share in raising the young.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Beaches and wetlands, often in pairs or small groups. Sometimes in large flocks. Cungulla and Bushland Beaches.

THREATS:

Nests and young are vulnerable to roaming dogs, cats and vehicles on the beach.



Masked Lapwing

Vanellus miles

DESCRIPTION:

Size 35-38cm, black cap, dusky brown back with white neck and underparts. Some have a black band from the back of the neck and around the shoulders. Each wing has a yellow spur. The bill and eyes are bright yellow, with a yellow mask above the eyes extending to wattles hanging down each side at the base of the bill.

FEEDING HABITS:

They feed alone, in pairs or small groups, looking on the ground for insects, larvae and earthworms.

BREEDING:

They lay their eggs in a scrape on open ground, defending the nesting area aggressively, diving at intruders and sometimes striking with their wing spurs. The male shares nest preparation, incubation and raising the chicks.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Man-made mown areas such as parks, roadside edges, and golf courses, natural open areas near swamps, lagoons, salt marshes and beaches.



Silver Gull

Chroicocephalus novaehollandiae

DESCRIPTION:

Size 38-43cm. A very common seabird with a white head and pale grey back and wings. Wings are tipped black and white. The adults have red legs and bill, a white eye with distinct red eye ring. Young birds have mottled brown back feathers with dark bills and legs.

FEEDING HABITS:

Silver gulls are scavengers, following trawlers, feeding in squabbling groups on beaches, and living in cities feeding on scraps and insects. They steal bird eggs and baby chicks.

BREEDING:

Nest in colonies on islands, at saltworks or in dead trees in lakes. Often use seaweed or beach debris to make a shallow nest. Both parents share nesting duties. The chicks are independent at six weeks.

Juru

Traditional Owner Value

LANGUAGE NAME:

Gullidala Gudjuda Dibala

MEANING:

Travel bird, friendly nuisance and fun

STORY:

The seagull travels to many places in search of friends, food and good times. It meets many challenges while on the ground and in the air.

Once the seagull finds a friend they hang around seeking friendships, but if you hurt the seagull he will leave and won't come back to you. Many times the seagull overcomes life threatening situations but survives to tell the story when he returns home.

PLACES TO LOOK:

This adaptable bird is a regular beach-goer, only leaving to breed. Your favourite fishing spot, local rubbish dump or land fill will be the place to find them.



Gull-billed Tern

Gelochelidon nilotica

DESCRIPTION:

Size 35-43cm. Large, pale tern with heavy black bill. Upper wing, back and tail light grey, wing tips darker grey. Underparts white. Feet black. Neat black cap pulled down over the eyes in breeding plumage. Non breeding birds have a white head with smudgy black eye/ear patch.

FEEDING HABITS:

They feed on small fish, crustaceans, grasshoppers, insects and larvae, frogs and lizards, swooping gracefully to pluck prey from water surface or ground.

BREEDING:

Often only seen singly or in pairs when not breeding. Breeding in colonies, mostly on remote inland lagoons after heavy rain or flooding. They nest on the ground in a shallow scrape surrounded by dry vegetation or flood debris. Both parents incubate the eggs and care for the young.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Usually coastal estuaries, mangroves, mudflats, freshwater swamps, salt marshes and beaches.



Caspian Tern

Hydroprogne caspia

DESCRIPTION:

Size 48-55cm. The Caspian Tern is the largest tern in the world and easily identified by its large red bill. Upper parts of the body are pale grey while the neck and underparts are white, the legs and feet are black. The head has a solid black cap during breeding and a streaky cap in non-breeding birds and juveniles.

FEEDING HABITS:

Patrols the water with long slender backswept wings, diving headlong into the water to catch fish which are usually swallowed in flight, head first.

BREEDING:

A shallow hollow in the sand serves as a nest. Both parents share incubation and rearing. Young are fed regurgitated whole fish. Often nest singly but sometimes in large colonies.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Found on beaches, wetlands, offshore islands, estuaries and freshwater dams. They can be found at Bushland Beach, Wunjunga and Lake Ross.



Crested Tern

Thalasseus bergii

DESCRIPTION:

Size 43-48cm. Back and upper wings silvery grey, breast, throat and belly white, the tail is forked. A long slightly downward curved pale yellow bill, white front to the forehead, and a black cap with a spiky hairdo make this tern easy to identify. In flight the pointed wings are backswept; the under-wings are white with dark grey tips.

FEEDING HABITS:

It hunts mainly for fish by diving into the water from several metres, taking prey from just beneath the surface.

BREEDING:

Nest in large colonies often with other terns. The nest is a shallow scrape in the sand or in soft soil on offshore islands. Both parents share incubation and care for the young.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Beaches, bays, islands offshore, sandspits, estuaries, salt ponds and lakes. Often seen around boats.



Little Tern

Sternula albifrons

DESCRIPTION:

Size 20-23cm. Very small white and grey seabird with long narrow wings, forked tail and yellow legs. During breeding has a yellow black-tipped bill and black cap. Non breeding birds have black bill, white forehead and crown.

FEEDING HABITS:

Feed at sea in small flocks. Fluttering rapidly, they plunge dive with wings up on shoals of small fish.

BREEDING:

They breed in colonies on sandy beaches and sandspits, making a small scrape in the sand or shell bank, sometimes lined with scraps of seaweed. Two to three eggs are laid, and hatch in about three weeks. Both parents share the incubation.

PLACES TO LOOK:

The beaches and sandspits at the mouths of rivers and creeks flowing into Bowling Green Bay are all nesting sites. Walk with care!

THREATS:

Little Terns are an ENDANGERED species. The exposed nests are vulnerable to unrestrained dogs, beach vehicles and human impact.



Peaceful Dove

Geopelia striata

DESCRIPTION:

Size 19-21cm. Small grey dove with heavily barred wings, back and nape, and white throat. Upper parts grey/brown with barred broken black lines, lower breast and belly white with pink tinge. Blue eye-ring, blue/grey bill with deep pink and black horizontal striped legs and feet. Undulating flight shows the rufous (reddish – brown) underwing and grey flight feathers. The call is a three note 'doodle-doo' or 'mollie-mok'.

FEEDING HABITS:

Eats seeds of a variety of seeding grasses and herbs. They feed at roadsides, dusty places and areas that have been burnt.

BREEDING:

Nest is a frail platform of sticks placed in a horizontal fork of a thick limb, or in a clump of twigs in a low tree, bush, or palm. Both parents incubate the eggs and look after the young.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Well grassed woodlands with nearby water supply, farmland areas, roadsides, parks, gardens, backyards.



Bar-shouldered Dove

Geopelia humeralis

DESCRIPTION:

Size 28-30cm. Slim, long-tailed grey/brown pigeon. Face, throat and breast blue/grey. Nape copper feathers tipped black. Back barred grey/brown. Tail is grey/brown with white tips – obvious in flight. Under wing shows chestnut. Eye is pale yellow with bare grey/reddish eye ring. Legs and feet are pink. Flight is swift with head up. The call sounds like “Support Bob Hawke”.

FEEDING HABITS:

Feed mainly on dry seed on open ground near cover.

BREEDING:

February-April. They build a shallow frail bowl of twigs and vine tendrils on a horizontal branch in dense foliage. Both parents incubate the eggs for 15-16 days and care for the young.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Near water in thick vegetation, mangroves, forests and river margins. Saunders Beach and Cungulla.

THREATS:

Degradation of habitat by the spread of settlements. The introduction of other dove species competing for food and habitat.



Red-tailed Black Cockatoo

Calyptorhynchus banksii

DESCRIPTION:

Size 50-60cm. Large glossy black cockatoo with a rounded crest and massive bill. The male has bright red panels under the tail; the female is smaller, duller, spotted and barred yellow, and her under-tail has panels of yellow/orange. They fly with slow wing beats in noisy flocks.

FEEDING HABITS:

Seed eaters, often feeding high in the tree tops and coming down to the ground to crack open fallen nuts and seeds.

BREEDING:

Nest in tree hollows, chewing the inside to make a layer of dry wood chips on which to lay a single egg. While the female incubates the egg, she is fed by the male. The nestling is fed by both parents in the morning and evening.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Woodlands, especially casuarina and plantings of beach almonds. The ground on the Strand, Townsville, is often covered with leaves and twigs broken off while they feed.

THREATS:

Lack of suitable trees for nesting holes.



Rainbow Lorikeet

Trichoglossus haematodus

DESCRIPTION:

Size 30cm. Familiar noisy and bold lorikeet. Bright red bill and eye, streaky violet/blue head, yellow/green nape, blue belly, red/orange chest and 'trousers', green back. Despite vibrant colours, difficult to see in trees. Large noisy flocks dart and twist through and above trees.

FEEDING HABITS:

Blossom feeder. Uses brush like tongue to harvest nectar and pollen from flowering eucalypts, banksias, paperbarks and bottlebrushes. Also feed on orchard fruits. Often feed hanging upside down.

BREEDING:

Probably pair for life. An elaborate courtship is followed by selecting a suitable tree hollow or dead limb for nesting. The female does most of the incubating, and the eggs hatch in about 3 weeks. Both parents feed the young which fledge in about 8 weeks.



Manbarra

Traditional Owner Value

LANGUAGE NAME:

Mungundula

MEANING:

Mens' business

STORY

The feathers from this bird is used for Men's business ceremony.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Rainforest, woodlands, urban parks and gardens. Encourage Rainbow Lorikeets to your garden by planting their favourite food trees or shrubs. Communal roosts in Townsville Mall and local parks.



Pheasant Coucal

Centropus phasianinus

DESCRIPTION:

Size 60-75cm. A skulking, mainly ground dwelling, pheasant-like bird. Short legged, long tailed, black body (breeding) or brown body (non breeding) with rufous barred wings and tail. Often seen running across roads or perched on dead trees or fence posts near long grass. Flies clumsily with heavily laboured wing movements.

FEEDING HABITS:

Their diet consists of small reptiles, frogs, large insects, eggs, young birds and crabs snatched from mangroves.

BREEDING:

The nest is well hidden in dense grass. It is built by tramping down a clump of plants to form a platform. The tops of surrounding plants are pulled down to form a roof over the nest leaving the sides open. This is the only cuckoo breeding in Australia that builds a nest, incubates and feeds its own young.

Manbarra
Traditional Owner
Value

LANGUAGE NAME:
Poodooran

MEANING:
Death in community

STORY
When the pheasant flies over your car or flies in front of you, it is a sign that a personal acquaintance or a friend will pass way.

PLACES TO LOOK:
Deeply grassed woodlands, open forests, gardens and roadside verges.

THREATS:
Vulnerable on roads where they are often killed by vehicles.



Barking Owl

Ninox connivens

DESCRIPTION:

Size 35-45cm. The only owl in this area looking down at you with 'piercing' yellow eyes. Broken vertical brown streaking on a whitish front. Back and wings are greyish/brown, the wings have white spots. Legs feathered, with powerful dull yellow feet. Roosts by day in leafy trees. Often found with the help of smaller birds "mobbing", giving away the location. Usually in pairs or family groups, sometimes with up to four young. The call is an unmistakable "wook wook" reminiscent of dogs barking.

FEEDING HABITS:

At night they feed on mammals, birds and insects.

BREEDING:

Nest in large tree hollows lined with a few sticks and debris. The female incubates the eggs and the male provides her food. The young stay with the parents for several months.

Juru

Traditional Owner Value

LANGUAGE NAME:

Wula Dibala

MEANING:

Death Bird

STORY:

When someone in the family is sick in hospital and we don't see the owl hanging around we know the family member will be alright.

When the owl hangs around night after night and makes a soft hooting sound we know that it won't be long before that family member in hospital dies.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Open forest, beside creeks, rivers and swamps with large paperbark trees.

THREATS:

Clearing of large trees suitable for nesting. Pesticides in prey.



Blue-winged Kookaburra

Dacelo leachii

DESCRIPTION:

Size 39-40cms. Has a big, square white head with brown streaks, a white eye and massive bill, dark above and pale below. It has a brown back, with light blue shoulders and blue wings. The male has a deep blue tail while the female's tail is rufous/brown. The Blue-winged Kookaburra is more colourful than the Laughing Kookaburra. The call, a rising and falling series of harsh ringing cackles, often between two or more family members.

FEEDING HABITS:

Feeds mainly on large insects, small lizards, snakes and frogs. Hunts from a tree perch to observe prey, mostly on the ground.

BREEDING:

Breeds between September and November in tree hollows. Lives in family groups and defends a territory throughout the year. Older offspring will stay with the parents and assist in rearing the young.

Manbarra
Traditional Owner Value

LANGUAGE NAME:
Bingunburra

MEANING:
Guardian

STORY:
The kookaburra is a guardian bird, and travels as a protector.

PLACES TO LOOK:
Open forest, woodlands, parks and gardens.



Forest Kingfisher

Todiramphus macleayii

DESCRIPTION:

Size 18-23cm. Head, wings and tail are a rich blue, black eye stripe. White 'headlights' in front of the eyes distinguish this bird. The underparts are white, sometimes with a rufous wash along the flanks. The male has a full white collar, with the female's collar being interrupted by a vertical blue line on the nape of the neck. White patch on the wings is noticeable in flight.

FEEDING HABITS:

Beetles, lizards, frogs, worms, spiders and grasshoppers. The prey is smashed against a branch to kill it and to dislodge wings.

BREEDING:

Nests can be in earth banks, tree hollows or termite nests in trees. Both parents fashion the nest. Both parents and often the previous year's offspring incubate the eggs and feed the young. The male is very protective.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Often seen along watercourses, open woodland, beaches, swamps, and frequently perched on power lines.



Rainbow Bee-eater

Merops ornatus

DESCRIPTION:

Size 23-28cm including tail shafts. Beautiful green and blue body with golden crown. Black line through the eye. Black bib beneath the yellow throat. Red eyes, black legs and slender curved black bill. Immature is paler and minus the black bib on the throat. The call, a sweet "prrp" is given in flight.

FEEDING HABITS:

Bees, dragonflies, wasps and other insects taken on the wing. This food provides most of the moisture required so they seldom need to drink. Often seen singly and sometimes in large flocks.

BREEDING:

Nests are constructed by tunnelling into banks or bare sandy ground. The end is enlarged to form the breeding chamber which is lined with grasses. Tunnels can be up to a metre long. Both parents construct the nest, incubate the eggs and feed the young.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Beaches, dunes, open woodlands and riverbanks.



Red-backed Fairy-wren

Malurus melanocephalus

DESCRIPTION:

Size 9-13cm. The smallest of the Fairy-wrens, with a long tapered 'cocked up' tail. During breeding the male is black with an orange/crimson saddle across the back and rump. Females are plain brown, creamy/white below. Voice is a high pitched tinny warble, or a soft, short rippling sound.

FEEDING HABITS:

Feed mainly on seeds and small insects, hopping through grassland, around fallen logs and under bushes.

BREEDING:

These birds have a lively courting display, and the males guard their territory vigorously. He has a 'harem' of up to five females. A neat dome-shaped nest is built low down in a grass clump or low bush. The males moult and lose much of their vivid colour after the breeding season and look more like the females.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Grassy woodlands, paddocks, riverbanks, especially along overgrown tracks and roadside edges.

THREATS:

Birds which nest on or near the ground may be preyed on by cats.



Helmeted Friarbird

Philemon buceroides

DESCRIPTION:

Size 31-37cm. The largest of the friarbirds, with dark bare skin around the face. A back sloping knob on the top edge of the bill, and a silvery/brown crown. Red eye. Dark brown back, wings and tail. Silvery/fawn brown on the throat, breast and underparts. Fairly harsh voice, often quite loud and noisy.

FEEDING HABITS:

Feed mainly on nectar and native fruits. Sometimes they also eat insects, found amongst leaves and bark crevices or taken in flight. Seasonally nomadic. Planting bottlebrush or grevilleas will encourage these birds into your garden.

BREEDING:

Nest is a deep cup of bark strips, grass and rootlets, slung from a horizontal fork high in foliage. Female builds the nest, and incubates the eggs, but both sexes feed the young.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Open woodlands, vine thickets, mangroves, and gardens. Wherever there are flowering trees and shrubs, as they tend to follow the blossoming and fruiting flora.



Yellow Honeyeater

Lichenostomus flavus

DESCRIPTION:

Size 16-18.5cm. A yellowish/green honeyeater with lemon yellow underparts and a faint dusky mask behind the brown eyes. The bill is slightly curved and dark. Found only in tropical Queensland. They are usually in pairs or small groups, constantly on the move, with loud chattering and ringing cheery calls.

FEEDING HABITS:

They search busily through shrubs and flowering trees, often joining other honeyeaters feeding on nectar in blossoms. Also eat insects and fruit among leaves and branches. Planting bottlebrush or grevilleas will encourage these birds into your garden.

BREEDING:

In summer a flimsy, shallow, cup-shaped nest of fibre, lined with fine grass and moss is built partly suspended from a tree fork. Two or three spotted eggs are laid. Both parents share in feeding the nestlings.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Open woodland, forested creeks, mangroves, orchards and gardens. Look in any flowering bottlebrushes or gums.



Brown Honeyeater

Lichmera indistincta

DESCRIPTION:

Size 12-16cm. Plain olive brown honeyeater, paler on belly, with a small yellow patch behind the eye. A fine yellow line on the gape in females and immature birds, changes to black in breeding males. The long dark downward curving bill is well suited to feeding on tubular flowers. Olive to yellow tips to wing feathers and tail. The call is a loud, ringing melodious trilling.

FEEDING HABITS:

Mainly a nectar feeder, but insects are also taken whilst hovering or on the wing in acrobatic flight. Plant grevilleas or install a birdbath to encourage them into your garden.

BREEDING:

The female builds a deep cup-shaped nest of bark strips, grass, leaves, and spider webs suspended in low growing foliage. She then incubates feeds the young while the male remains guarding their territory.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Common in gardens, eucalypt forests, woodlands, watercourse trees, mangroves, and wherever there are flowering trees and shrubs.



Lemon-bellied Flycatcher

Microeca flavigaster

DESCRIPTION:

Size 12-14cm. Mainly olive/brown on the head, back and tail, with black legs and bill and pale lemon wash on underparts. The throat is white or slightly tinged yellow.

FEEDING HABITS:

Sometimes alone or in small family groups, they flutter quietly among the foliage of the tree canopy in search of insects or perch on open twigs, watching for insects on the wing. They dart out then often return to the same spot to consume what they have caught and wait for the next unsuspecting victim. Caterpillars, ants and beetles are part of their diet.

BREEDING:

They build a tiny nest of fine bark strips and spider web in the fork of a tree, sometimes over water and usually camouflaged by bark strips to match the tree. Although normally quiet, during the breeding season they perform noisy singing flights.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Woodlands, rainforest margins and paperbark swamps.



Leaden Flycatcher

Myiagra rubecula

DESCRIPTION:

Size 15cm. Male: head, back, wings, tail and throat deep leaden grey; rest of underparts white. Black feet, dark eyes and bill. Female: head and nape leaden grey, back, wings and tail mid grey/brown, throat and upper breast orange/rufous; rest of underparts white.

FEEDING HABITS:

Capture their food in flight, picking insects off foliage or out of the air, in short circling dashes from a perch. Their diet includes small dragonflies, termites, cicadas, beetles, weevils, flies, native bees and wasps.

BREEDING:

Nest is a neat, shallow, broad-based cup made of fine bark strips and grass matted together with cobwebs, decorated with lichen and small strips of bark. It is built on a limb or fork in the open. Both parents build the nest, incubate the eggs and feed the young.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Coastal scrub, mangroves, eucalypt and paperbark woodland and along watercourses.



Magpie-lark (known locally as Peewee)

Grallina cyanoleuca

DESCRIPTION:

Size 26-30cm. Black and white distinctive markings. Male: has a black head and throat and a white eyebrow. Female has a white forehead and throat. Both have whitish bills and white/cream eye ring. Legs black. The loud "peewee" call gives them their name. Not related to magpies.

FEEDING HABITS:

Feed on the ground eating insects, caterpillars and earthworms.

BREEDING:

Both parents share in building a cup-shaped mud nest, lined with grass and feathers, often on a man made structure or high up on a horizontal branch. Both sexes incubate and raise three to five young. They may raise more than one brood each year.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Pairs and family groups can be seen in back yards, parks and bushland throughout the region. Although small, they are often seen chasing kites and other larger birds.



Spangled Drongo

Dicrurus bracteatus

DESCRIPTION:

Size 28-32cm. Black plumage with glossy iridescent greenish/blue sheen, and not very obvious scattered small spots on neck and upper breast, giving a spangled appearance. Strong black bill with bristles around base, bright red eye. Often seen on a perch flicking the out curved 'fishtail'. The call is a loud, harsh, rasping scissor-like sound with a metallic-sounding voice. Can mimic other birds.

FEEDING HABITS:

Often solitary or in pairs, they feed mainly on insects taken on the wing, while foraging on trunks or foliage of trees for spiders, beetles or other small prey. Often harasses other birds, even raptors. Sometimes takes nestlings and small birds.

BREEDING:

Nest is a delicate deep basket of twigs, plant stems and spiders' webs attached to horizontal fork of outer branches. Both birds share in incubating and care for the young.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Open woodlands, vine thickets, edges of rainforests, mangroves, beachside parks and gardens. Palmetum, Townsville. Muller's Lagoon, Bowen.



Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike

Coracina novaehollandiae

DESCRIPTION:

Size 30-36cm. Mainly blue-grey back with paler grey on the front and almost white under the tail. The wing tips and tail have striking dark grey feathers with white edges. There is a black 'mask' around the eyes, face and throat. Immature birds only have a broad black streak running from the beak to behind the eye. The undulating flight and wing 'shuffle' on landing easily identify this bird.

FEEDING HABITS:

Eats a wide range of insects such as crickets and grasshoppers, spiders, grubs, caterpillars and some small fruits or berries. Often feeds alone or in pairs, but occasionally gather in large groups.

BREEDING:

The neat saucer-like nest, made of fine rootlets and pine-needles or casuarina leaves bound with spider web, is small for the size of the bird. Male and female share in nest building and incubation.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Eucalypt and paperbark woodlands, tree-lined watercourses, parks and gardens.



White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike

Coracina papuensis

DESCRIPTION:

Size 26-28cm. Blue/grey bird with white underparts and darker grey flight and tail feathers, white tip to tail. Black bill with short black mask joining the dark eye, and fine white rear eye-ring. Legs black. Juvenile birds have faint barring on the breast and the back is mottled. Undulating flight, with long glides alternating with bursts of wing beats, then distinctive shuffling and folding of wings on landing. Found singly or in pairs.

FEEDING HABITS:

Mainly insects from branches or caught on the wing, as well as native fruits.

BREEDING:

Nest is a well concealed shallow saucer of fine twigs and bark, bound with spider-web, high in the horizontal fork of a tree. Both parents share in building the nest, incubating the eggs and feeding the young.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Eucalypt woodlands, open forests, grasslands, mangroves, parks and gardens.

THREATS:

Clearing of woodland areas for development.



Australasian Figbird

Sphecotheres vieilloti

DESCRIPTION:

Size 27-30cm. In this area two forms interbreed. Male: black head, olive back. Bare red/pink/blue-grey skin around the eye, the throat and belly can be yellow/grey/olive or anything in between. Black bill, buff legs. Black tail has noticeable white edges. Female: brown head and back, the bare skin around the eye is grey/brown. Underparts are heavily streaked brown on dull white. Legs grey.

FEEDING HABITS:

Forage in pairs or groups through the foliage for figs and soft fruits, berries or insects.

BREEDING:

Nest is cup shaped, made of fine twigs and vines, placed suspended by the rim in the fork of a horizontal branch. Often figbirds will nest in small groups. Both parents incubate the eggs and care for the young.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Woodlands, parks and gardens with fig trees. Balgal, Saunders, Cungulla, Alva and Bowen beachside vegetation.



White-breasted Woodswallow

Artamus leucorhynchus

DESCRIPTION:

Size 17-18cm. Stocky bird. Head, throat, wings, back and tail are slate grey cut off sharply by pure white breast, belly and rump. Bill is blue, tipped with black. The juveniles are mottled brown and cream. They are usually seen in small groups and cluster tightly on branches when the weather is cool.

FEEDING HABITS:

An aerial feeder, constantly chattering, soars over water in pursuit of insects. Some take nectar.

BREEDING:

Nest is a cup of grass in an upright tree hollow, often in palms at the base of the fronds. Both sexes share nest building, incubation and care for the young. The juveniles then continue to stay with the parents for several weeks.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Rarely far from water. Open woodland, wetlands, and rivers. Large groups snuggle together on power poles/lines.



Great Bowerbird

Ptilonorhynchus nuchalis

DESCRIPTION:

Size 33-38cm. Large, active and inquisitive bird with fawn/grey head and breast. Back, dark grey/brown with pale scalloping. When displaying, they show a lilac/pink patch on the nape. Often craning the neck, bounding on the ground with half spread drooping wings and tail cocked. The call can be a wide vocal range of hisses, cackles, chirring and also mimics other birds.

FEEDING HABITS:

Mainly fruits, berries and insects. Seldom far from water.

BREEDING:

To attract a female, males build a bulky bower of small sticks about 50cm high and up to a metre long. Decorated with white stones, dried bones, shells, green, red and shiny objects. The female builds a nest some distance from the bower – a bowl of sticks, lined with fine twigs built in dense shrubbery. She cares for the young alone.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Near water, eucalyptus woodlands, dense thickets, mangroves, vine scrub, parks and gardens.



Double-barred Finch

Taeniopygia bichenovii

DESCRIPTION:

Size 10-11cm. A neat cinnamon brown, grey and white finch with an owl-like face bordered with black. Two distinct black bands or bars on white underparts give this finch its name. The wings are spotted white on black, the tail is black with a white rump. The bill is blue-grey.

FEEDING HABITS:

Feeds on seeds, usually in small flocks on the ground or among grassland, never far from water. When breeding will also eat insects.

BREEDING:

Builds a scruffy bottle-shaped nest of grass lined with feathers and plant down. The nest is often in pandanus or thick shrubs. Four to five eggs are laid, both birds share in incubation and caring for the young.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Open woodland, grasslands, near creeks and dams, farmlands and gardens. Town Common, Lake Ross, Toolakea Beach.



Olive-backed Sunbird

Nectarinia jugularis

DESCRIPTION:

Size 10-12cm. These delightful small birds have bright yellow underparts and olive green wings. Males are distinctive, with their iridescent blue from chin to upper breast. They have long, curved bills to enable them to get nectar from deep within tubular flowers.

FEEDING HABITS:

Nectar and insects are their preferred diet. Often hovering at flowers to feed, or taking spiders from webs. The young are fed insects.

BREEDING:

The nest is long and pendulous with a little hood over the side opening and is attached to a branch or, quite often, a rope or wire near a dwelling. The female constructs the nest, made of bark strips and grasses woven together with cobwebs and lining it with down. Both incubate the two eggs. The male helps with feeding the young.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Gardens, parks and mangroves.



Welcome Swallow

Hirundo neoxena

DESCRIPTION:

Size 15cm. These sleek birds are streamlined for aerobatic flight. Head and shoulders glossy blue/black, the lower back, wings and tail feathers are a dull dark brown/black. The forehead and throat are bright chestnut, the underparts are pale grey. When flying overhead, the long forked tail with small white spots near the tip, and long tapered wings, help to identify this bird.

FEEDING HABITS:

They tend to feed in groups and can be seen wheeling, swooping and diving, catching insects in flight.

BREEDING:

Build a mud cup, lined with grass and feathers, under cliff overhangs or in hollow tree branches. Around towns their nests are found under shop awnings, verandas, and bridges. Males share building and incubation.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Wetlands where they swoop down to dip their bills in the pools to drink. They are easiest to identify when perching on powerlines or sitting on wire fences.

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