


Birds of the Gloucester Tops



The Gloucester Tops

- Part of the Barrington Tops & Gloucester Tops Important Bird & Biodiversity Area (IBA)
 - IBAs were first declared in Australia in 2009
 - Trigger species for this IBA: Rufous Scrub-bird
 - Supporting species:
 - Flame Robin
 - Paradise Riflebird
 - Pale-yellow Robin
 - Australian Logrunner
 - Green Catbird
 - Regent Bowerbird
- 
- Low/mid altitude birds
- Gloucester Tops Habitat:
 - A mosaic comprising patches of eucalyptus forest and Antarctic Beech forest with some areas of snow gum
 - Eucalyptus forest: Dense understorey at 0.5-1.0m and very dense understorey at <20cm
 - Occasional snow (*cf* Barrington Tops)
 - Overlap of Manning River and Hunter River catchment areas

Barrington Tops/Gloucester Tops IBA

- Nominated Species:



Pale-yellow Robin



Rufous Scrub-bird



Flame Robin



Green
Catbird



Aust. Logrunner

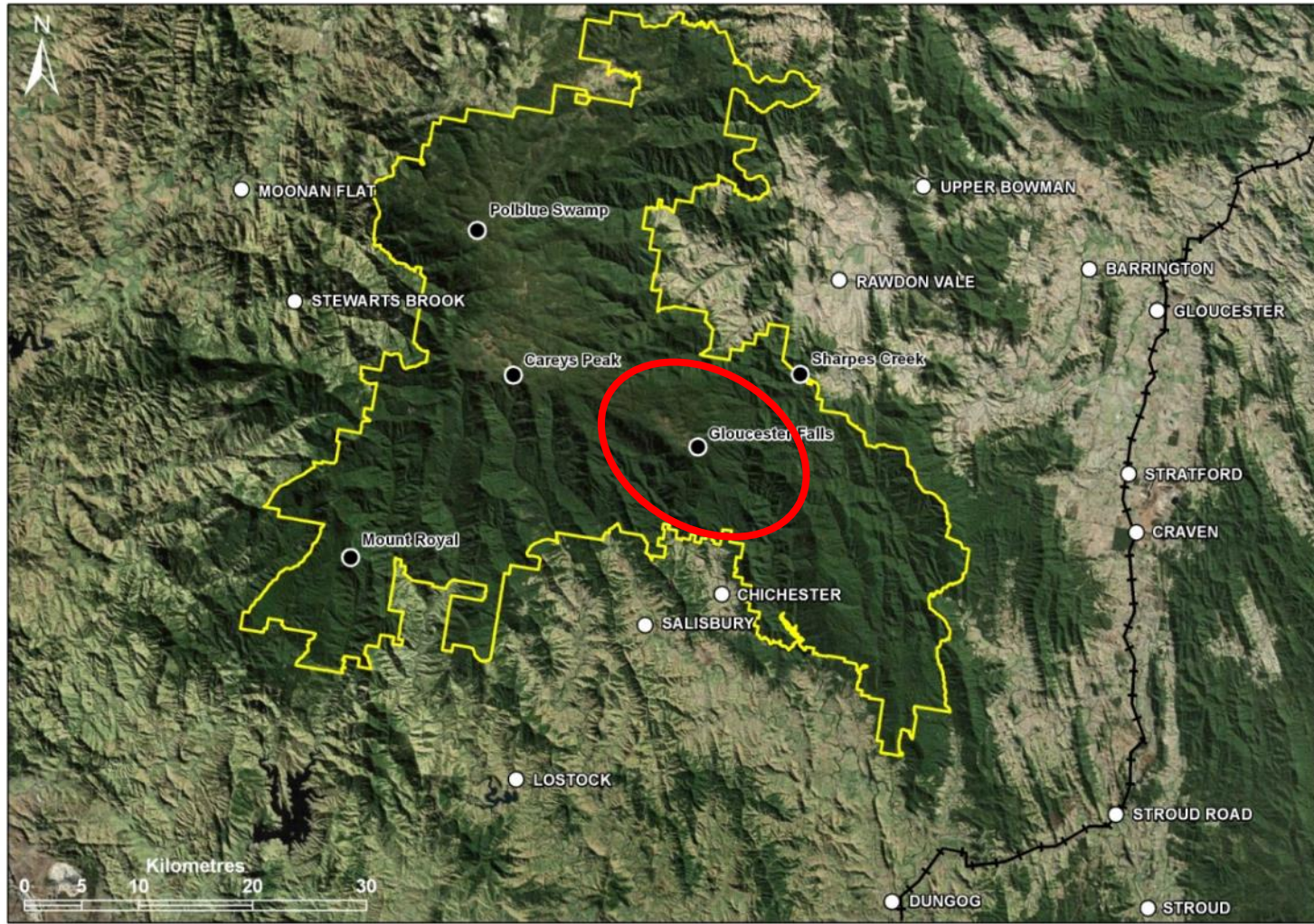


Regent
Bowerbird



Paradise Riflebird

Where is it?



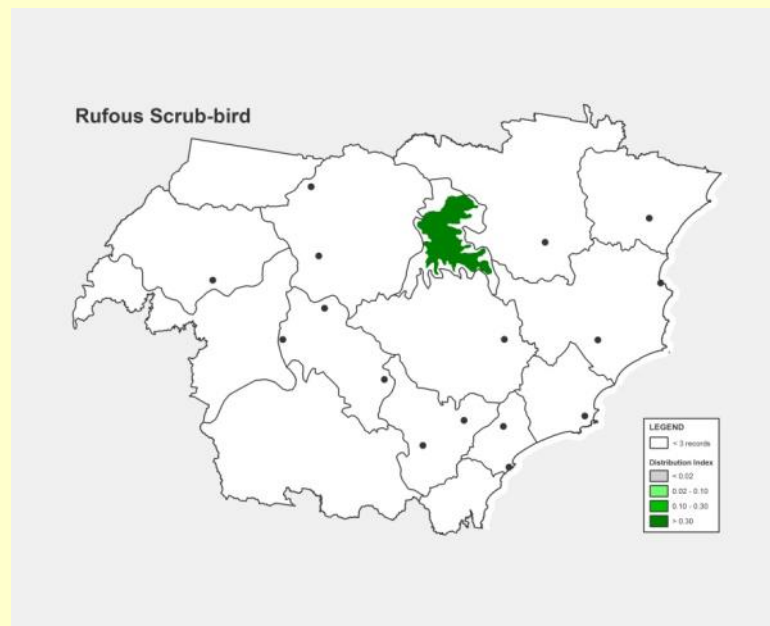
Barrington Tops & Gloucester Tops IBA

Five feature birds

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

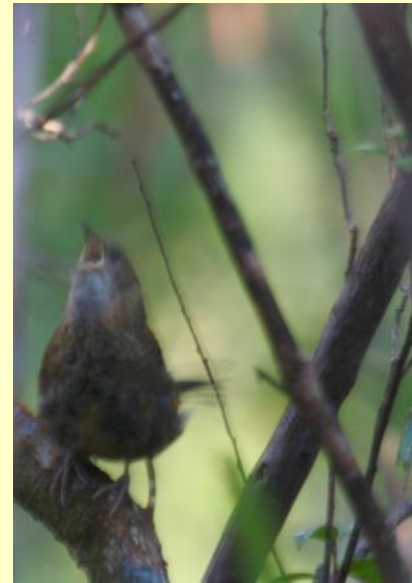
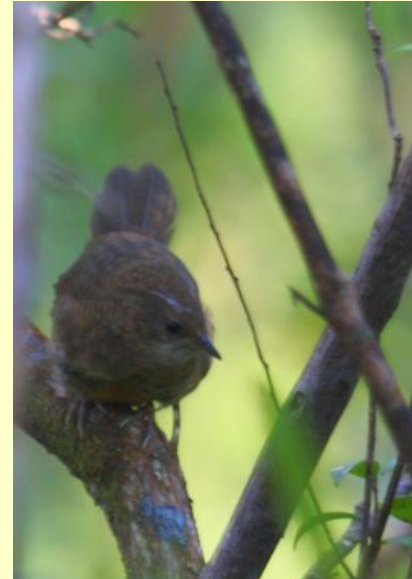
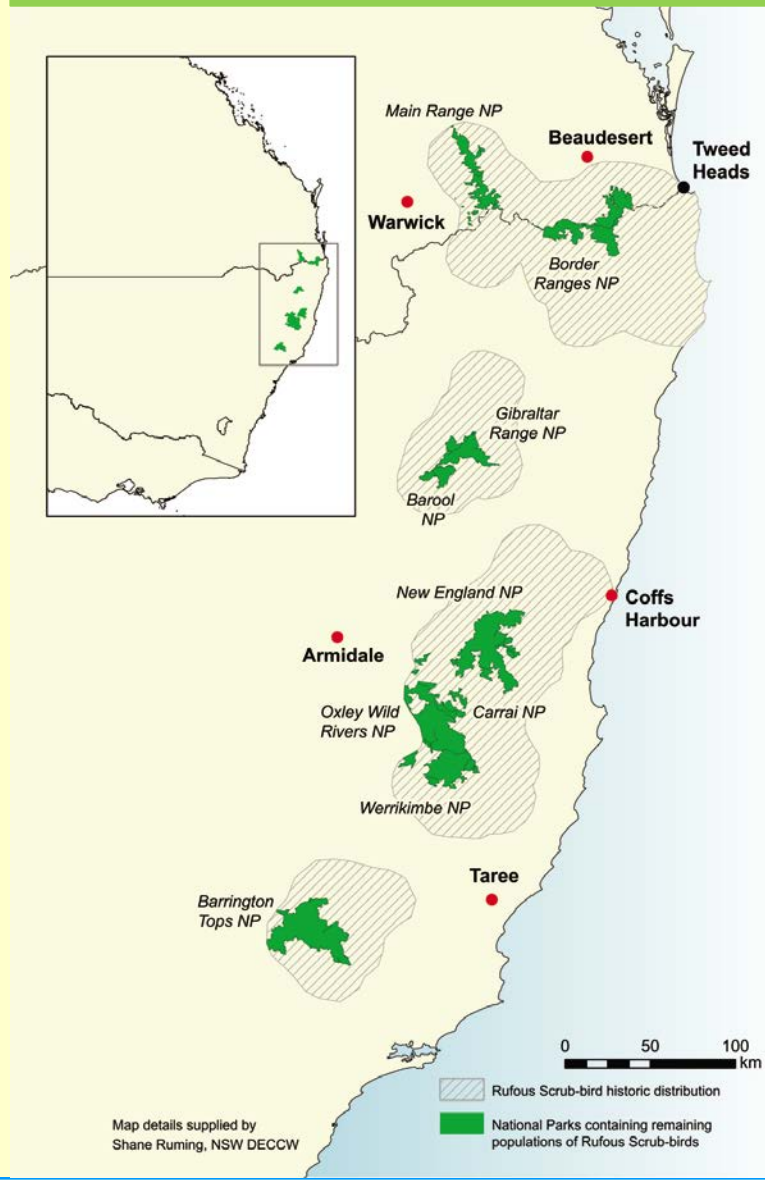
2010-2016: 67 species have been recorded at <1,100m

Rufous Scrub-bird



- Recording Rate 53% from 289 x 500m radius surveys 2010-2014
- Our surveyors (2010-2015) have walked ~550km!

Current & former range



How we survey for Scrub-birds

- Transects along roads and walking tracks
 - 21km of transects 2010-2014
 - Scaled-back effort for 2015-2017
- Record **all** species in each 1 km linear transect (= 500m radius BLA Atlas survey)
- Note the precise locations of all calling scrub-birds in each transect
 - Confirmed as a breeding territory if recorded at the same location in consecutive years or at ≥ 4 week interval
 - We are detecting birds within ~150m of the road/track (under ideal conditions)



Gloucester Tops Rufous Scrub-birds

- Southern sub-species *Atrichornis rufescens ferrieri*
- Not a rainforest bird!
 - Occurs in eucalyptus forest with dense understorey (0.5-1m) and very dense ground storey (0-20cm)
 - Antarctic Beech forest is adjacent (sometimes with emergent Beech in the RSB territory)
 - Territories are often near creek-lines or swamps
- Only the males call
 - Soft “tkk” by females
- A calling bird may be a male scrub-bird with a territory, or a wandering young male
- Females occupy a small patch alongside male’s territory



Gloucester Tops Rufous Scrub-birds

- Simon Ferrier (1980's PhD) found scrub-birds to ~900m in the Gloucester Tops
- So did Ekert (~2000-2003)
- In the surveys since 2010: we have not found a scrub-bird below 1,100m
 - Effects from fires & climate change??
- We have also failed to confirm the presence of birds outside of the core area that we survey
- However, the density of territories seems unchanged from a study by Ferrier in 1981 (in the >1,100m range)
- There has never been a breeding record
 - Now there's a challenge!

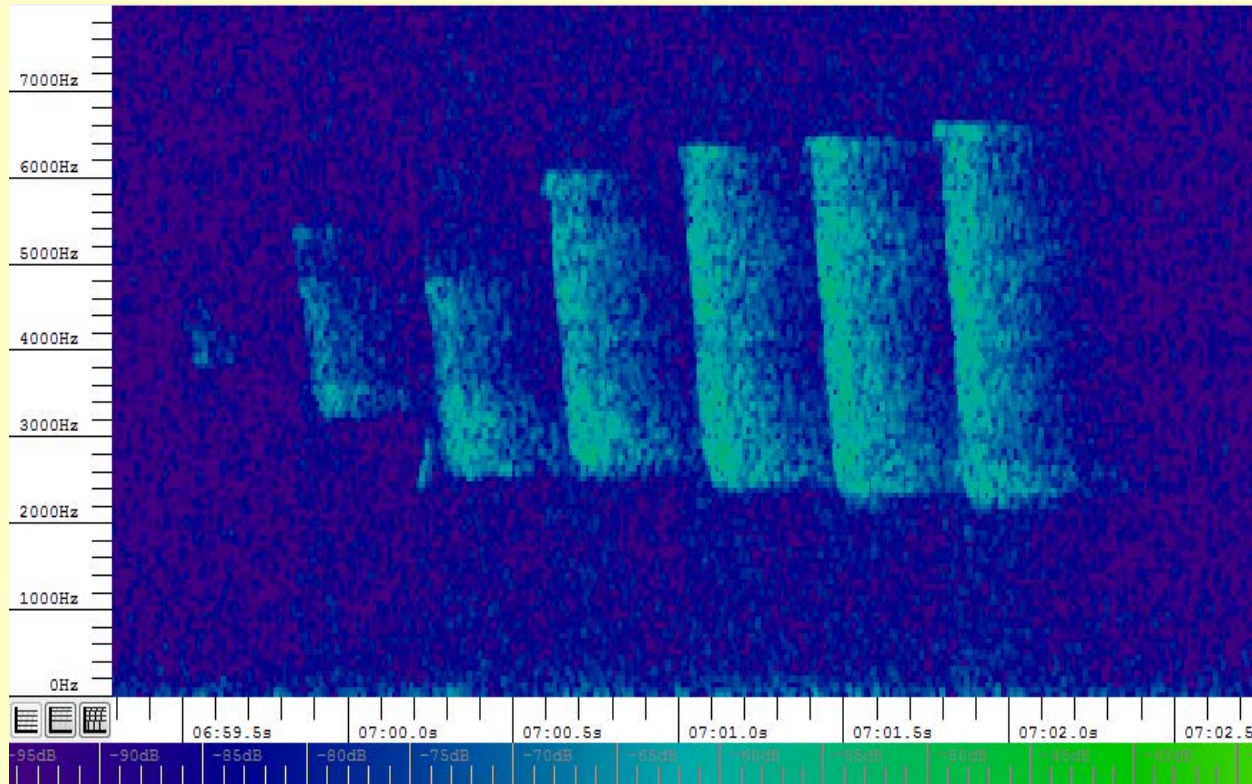
Song Meters

- All-weather non-intrusive recording devices
- HBOC purchased a Song Meter in 2011 for use in field studies program
 - Used several times at known scrub-bird territories
 - Preliminary results published in *The Whistler*
- January 2015: Birdlife Southern NSW purchased 2 x Song Meters (*robust new version!*) using Twitchathon IBA funds
 - On loan to HBOC for scrub-bird studies
 - Recording at 2 x territories simultaneously for 1-2 weeks at a time under identical weather conditions
 - Finding about calling behaviour during the day, and seasonally
 - *Opportunity for assistance with data analysis 😊*

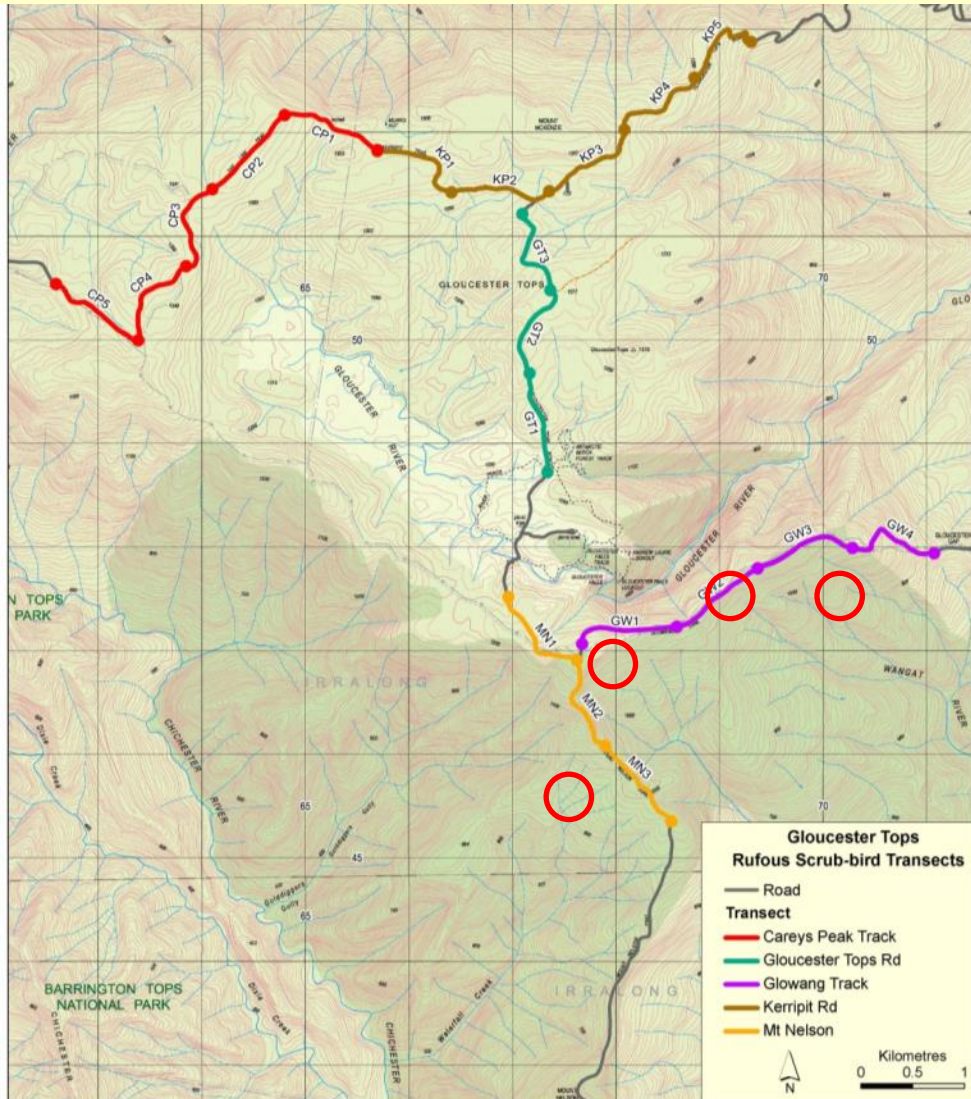


Sonograms

- Digital record of a bird's call
 - e.g. frequency vs time

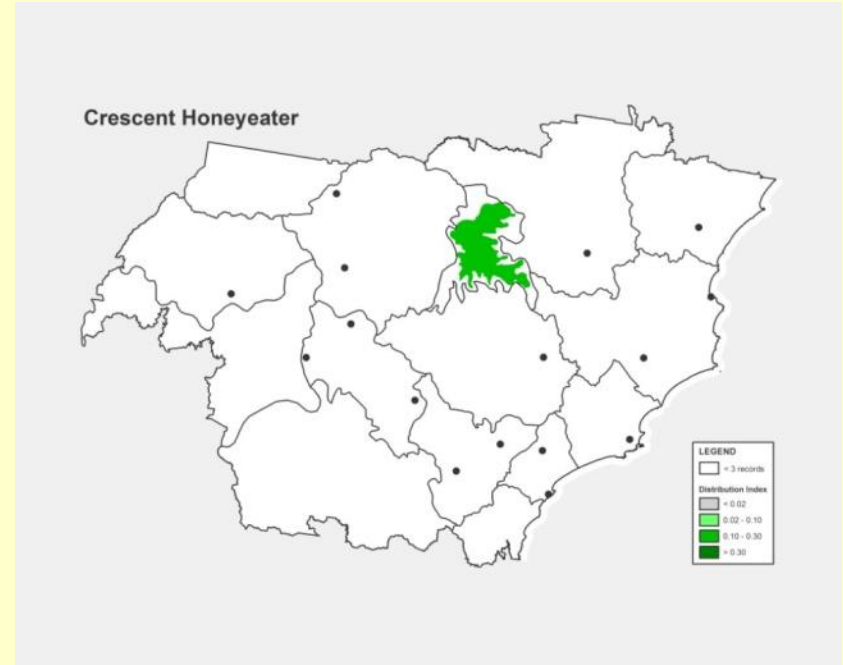


Are there Hunter catchment Scrub-birds?



- Birds along the Mt Nelson Track, after the first km
 - 2010-2011: a distant territory in MN3
 - 2011: a territory in MN2 just beyond Glowang Track junction
- Birds along the Glowang Track, on the RHS
 - All years: A territory in GW2, which straddles the track
 - 2010-2012: A distant territory in GW3

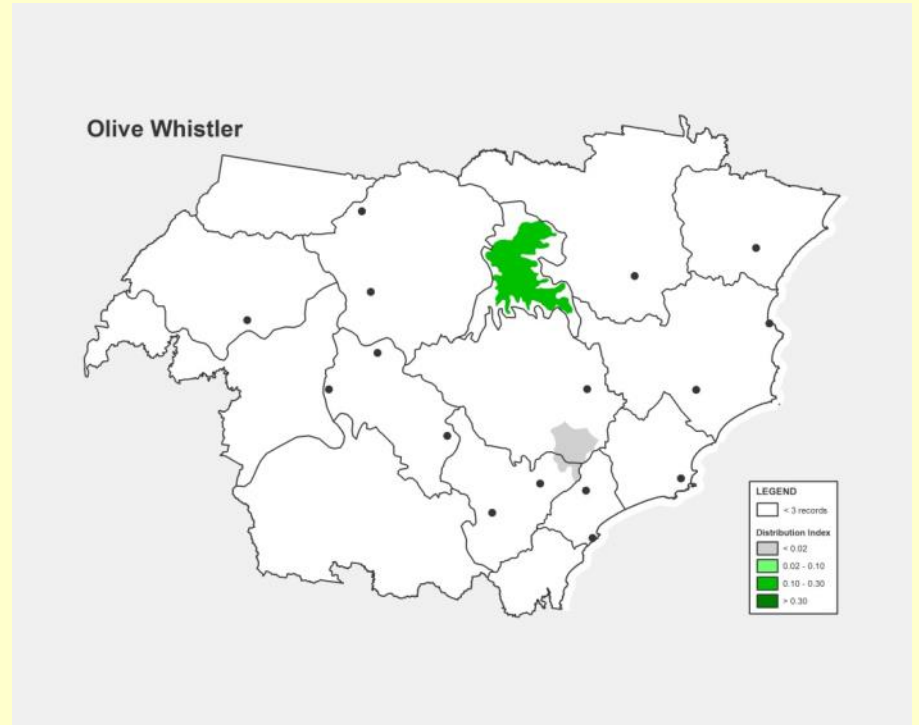
Crescent Honeyeater



- Recording Rate 37%
- Probably present year-round
 - There are winter records
 - We do have occasional low-altitude winter records
 - Breeding has never been recorded (another challenge!)



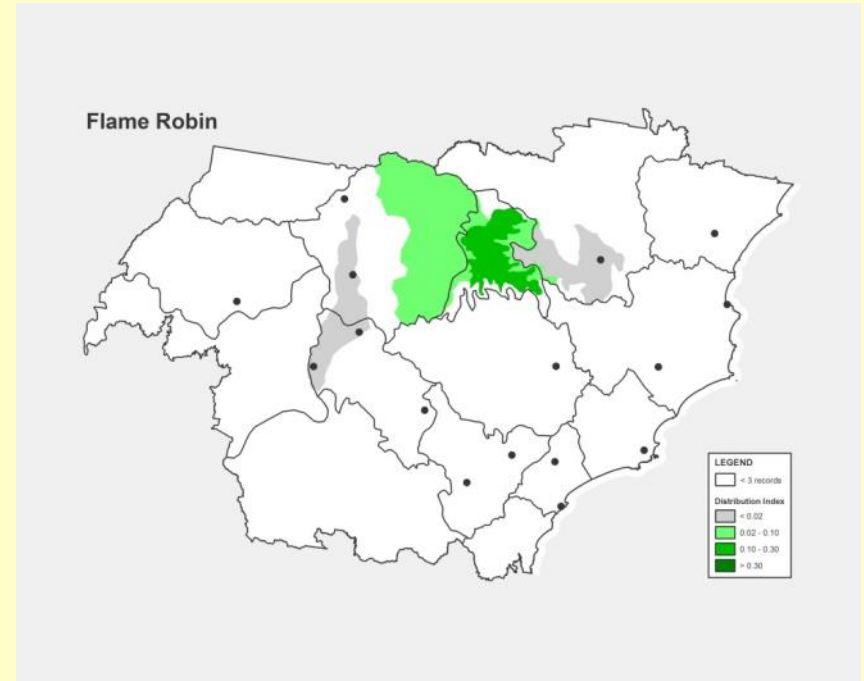
Olive Whistler



- Recording Rate 30%
- Present year-round?
 - There are no winter records (however, 2 x May records)
 - Breeding has never been recorded (another challenge!)



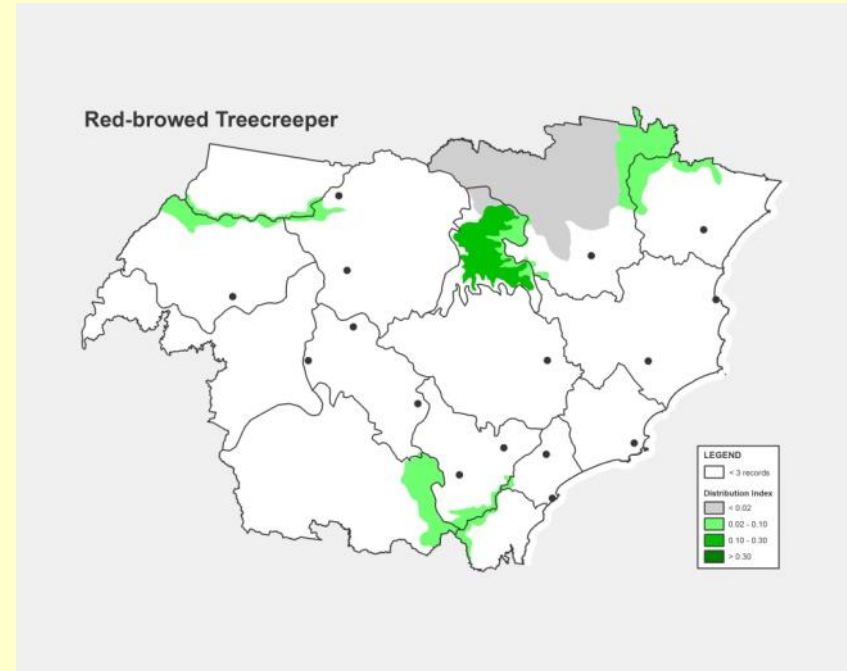
Flame Robin



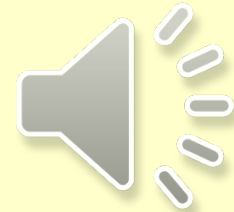
- Recording Rate 13% (but abundance can be high)
- RR lowered because very few birds have arrived in September?
- There are regular breeding records



Red-browed Treecreeper



- Recording Rate 9%
- No records in 2012
- Gloucester Tops breeding records
- No winter records (in the Gloucester Tops)
- Are they resident??

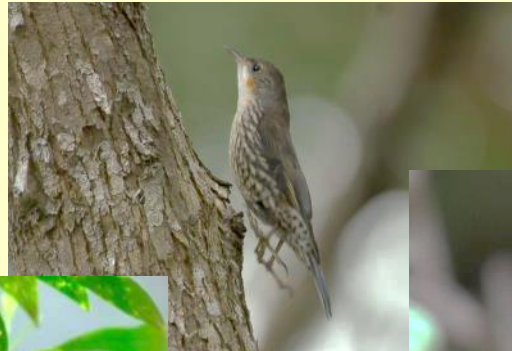


Other birds of Spring

- 67 species recorded in our surveys. 36 have Recording Rates >5%

RR >70%

- Brown Thornbill, White-throated Treecreeper, Crimson Rosella, White-browed Scrubwren, Grey Fantail



Other birds of Spring

RR 50-70%

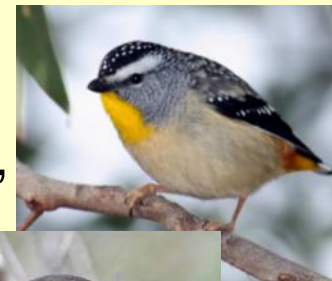
- Eastern Whipbird, Golden Whistler, Pied Currawong, Rufous Scrub-bird, Eastern Yellow Robin



Other birds of Spring

RR 20-50%

- Spotted Pardalote, Crescent Honeyeater, Grey Shrike-thrush, Rose Robin, Striated Thornbill, Eastern Spinebill, Striated Pardalote, Superb Lyrebird, Olive Whistler, Fan-tailed Cuckoo



Other birds of Spring

RR 10-20%

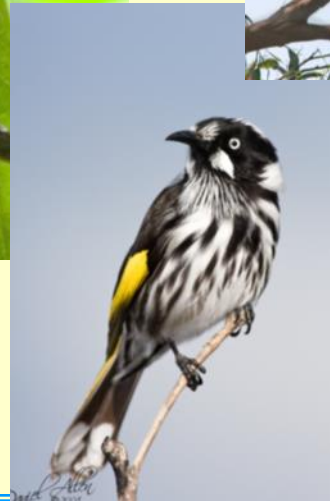
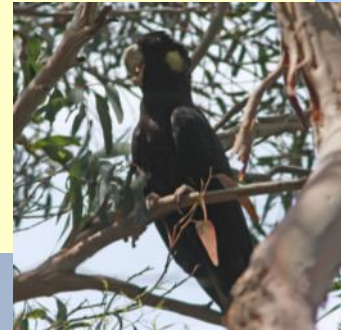
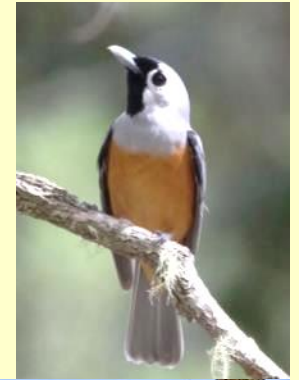
- Yellow-faced Honeyeater, Satin Bowerbird, Brown Gerygone, Flame Robin, Red Wattlebird, Laughing Kookaburra, Lewin's Honeyeater



Other birds of Spring

RR 5-10%

- Black-faced Monarch, Red-browed Treecreeper, Silvereye, Yellow-throated Scrubwren, Australian King-Parrot, New Holland Honeyeater, Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo, Bassian Thrush, Large-billed Scrubwren



For special discussion

Lewin's Rail

- Three records at three sites in 6 years of spring surveys
- This is a very versatile species in our Region!
 - Hexham Swamp,
Broughton Island,
Gloucester Tops, ...



For special discussion

Satin Flycatcher

- RR in spring surveys is 1.3%
- Possibly arrives late spring or early summer?
 - There are Kerripit Rd records for Oct-Jan (mainly Dec-Jan)
- Barrington Tops seem a more prospective location to find this species



At other times of the year?

- Rufous Scrub-birds continue to call at their territories
 - Less frequently especially in autumn/winter
- Honeyeater influxes occurring in autumn:
 - Eastern Spinebills April-May 2012, 2013, 2016
 - New Holland Honeyeaters May 2016
 - Miscellaneous autumn records of other Honeyeater species e.g. Fuscous, White-cheeked
 - Autumn (and winter) visits by birdwatchers don't occur often!



Low and mid altitude birds

- Dominated by rainforest birds
- 63 species recorded around Sharpes Creek (campsite):
 - Noisy Pitta, Pale-yellow Robin, Bassian & Russet-tailed Thrush, Black-faced and Spectacled Monarch, Aust. Brush-turkey, Superb Lyrebird,
 - Plus standard rainforest scrubwrens, thornbills, finches, etc
- Going up the hill:
 - Bell Miner, Paradise Riflebird, Brown Cuckoo-Dove, Wonga Pigeon, Superb Lyrebird,
 - Plus standard rainforest scrubwrens, thornbills, finches, etc
- ***All 5 of the “feature species” are missing***

In conclusion

- The Gloucester Tops at >1,100m has species found almost nowhere else in our region
- Most birdwatchers barely scratch the surface of this amazing place
- Where's the best place for Rufous Scrub-birds?
 - Across the Gloucester River along the Glowang Track
 - 3-4km along the Careys Peak Track
- Rufous Scrub-birds call all year but most reliably in spring (breeding season)
 - Some days, they call almost continuously all day
- *Hardly anyone has seen a Hunter Valley scrub-bird!*

Photos

Allan Richardson

Lorna Mee

David Stowe

Dick Jenkin

Jim Smart

Steve Merrett

Alan Stuart

Internet

Maps

Dan Williams

Shane Ruming

Bird Calls

BOCA CDs (edited)

www.thinkingaboutbirds.com