

Common Bronzewing

Phaps chalcoptera

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Hunter Bird
Observers Club

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A male Common Bronzewing, with all of the key identification features apparent (photo: Steve Merrett)

This is a widespread Australian species, albeit never “common” when considered in comparison to many other widespread and truly common species. It is a plump pigeon, with a deep rounded chest, small head and broad rounded wings. It is found in a large variety of woodland and grassland habitats, although mainly it is absent from desert areas and from wet forests.

Adult males have a bright buff-coloured forehead and brown/chestnut crown, blue/purple band on the side of their neck, and pink/brown breast and flanks. For females those parts of their plumage are dull grey/brown. Females have an overall duller appearance, and they lack the iridescent copper/bronze wing patches of males.

Males and females are similarly sized, and both sexes incubate. There are no

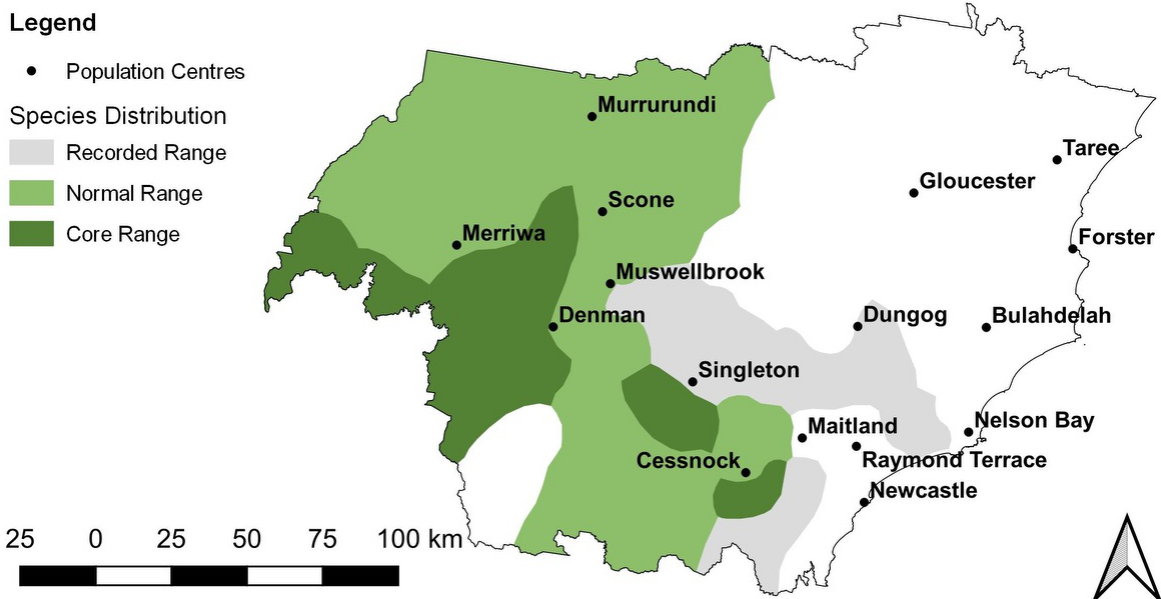
recognised subspecies. Juveniles are plain – resembling females (but, juvenile males already have a vestigial buff-coloured forehead). Juveniles moult to adult plumage within their first year.



A juvenile male Common Bronzewing – note the incipient pale forehead (photo: Rob Palazzi)

Regional Status

The Common Bronzewing is considered to be a breeding resident here. It probably is nomadic, as is the case elsewhere, and perhaps some birds depart the region at times. The details about any local movements has not been investigated. Its stronghold locally is the western parts of the region – it is uncommon elsewhere. Records from the north-eastern parts of the region are infrequent but there have been occasional reports from wooded areas such as Crowdy Bay NP, Lansdowne State Forest, etc. The scarcity of such records is why they do not show in the distribution map.



Distribution map for Common Bronzewing in the Hunter Region (map prepared by Dan Williams)

Bronzewings as prey

Just like all the plump pigeons and doves, Common Bronzewings were considered by humans to be a prized food item. In the early to mid-20th Century, they were shot illegally in large numbers, for food and for sport. In 1961, ornithologist John Hobbs reported that bags of up to 100 birds were sometimes being taken. This widespread assault caused significant local population declines in some areas. However, when supplies of ammunition became restricted during World War 2, Common Bronzewing populations began to recover.

It has been reported that Common Bronzewings (and also Brush Bronzewings) are rarely killed by cats or foxes – and it has been suggested that this was because these pigeons sometimes feed on seeds of the poisonous shrub *Gastrolobium bilobum* (Heart-leaved Poison). Many other *Gastrolobium* species also produce the same poison (which is sodium monofluoroacetate – naturally occurring 1080). Most of these *Gastrolobium* shrubs are only found in the south-west of WA. However, various other plants also produce the same poison in smaller quantities – for example *Acacia georginae* (Poison Gidyea) which occurs in central Australia.

Avian predators such as falcons aren't inhibited by 1080, which is a mammalian poison.



A pair of Common Bronzewings, male on the right (photo: Alan Stuart)

About the name

Common Bronzewing

Our bird became known as the “bronze-wing pigeon” from the early days of European settlement, in acknowledgement of its distinctive iridescent bronze/gold secondary wing coverts. In comparison to the two other Australian bronzewings (Brush and Flock Bronzewings) it has a more widespread range (around where there are people, at least) and hence it is the “common” one. Eventually, the “pigeon” part of its name disappeared, most probably as the result of vernacular familiarity.

Phaps chalcopteras

The genus name is from the Greek word for wild pigeon *phaps*, while the species name is an amalgamation of the Greek words *khalkos*, bronze or copper, and *pteron*, wing. That’s all very straightforward!



A female Common Bronzewing (photo: Rob Palazzi)

Design Rob Kyte at Conservation Matters 0420 821 460 **Text** by Alan Stuart based on information mainly sourced from • HBOC's Hunter Region annual bird report series • Volumes 1-7 of HANZAB (the Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds) • Bird in the Hand (ABSA information sheet series) • Menkhorst et al. (2017). The Australian Bird Guide • Ian Fraser & Jeannie Gray (2013). Australian Bird Names. A Complete Guide.

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