

JANUARY 2020 #1



## Featured Bird Series

### Golden Whistler *Pachycephala pectoralis*

## Description

The c.17-18 cm adult males are strikingly coloured black, white and yellow birds. They attain full adult plumage early in their third year, coinciding with the post-breeding moult of adults.

Females are plain grey birds, occasionally mis-identified as a Grey Shrike-thrush (which is larger and has a more horizontal stance). Both males and females are accomplished singers.

Juvenile Golden Whistlers have rich rufous plumage. Immature birds retain rufous edges to the wing coverts and the outer edges of the secondaries into their second year. Most adult females cannot be reliably separated from immature 2+ year old males.



Photo: Alwyn Simple

## Ageing

	Adult (male)	Immature	Juvenile
Bill	Black	Dull black with whitish base;	Grey with pink base
Gape	Black	Yellow becoming whitish	Yellow
Eye	Red-brown or brick-red	Black-brown, or dark red-brown	Black-brown or dark brown
Wing coverts	Grey-black, olive-yellow tips	Rufous edges	Rufous
Secondaries	Grey-black, olive-grey tips	Rufous outer edges into their second year	Rufous



Photo: Rob Palazzi

Immature Golden Whistler



Photo: Rob Palazzi

Immature Golden Whistler



Photo: Rob Palazzi

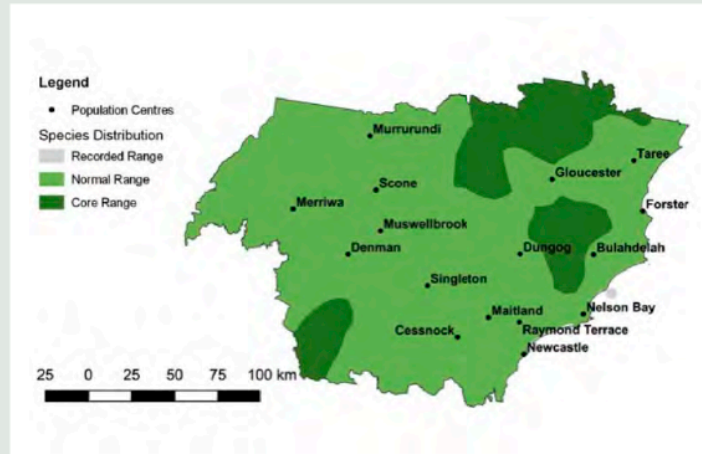
Juvenile Golden Whistler

## Regional Status

The Golden Whistler is a common breeding resident, with a widespread distribution. It is found in woodlands and forests throughout the Hunter Region.

The long-term trend of records suggests a stable population.

Distribution of the Golden Whistler in the Hunter Region (Map prepared by Dan Williams).



Sub-species *pectoralis*



Immature *youngi*-type bird

## Sub-species

Two sub-species of Golden Whistler occur in our region. However, the situation is complex, because of the presence of intergrades.

To the north of the Hunter River, birds are understood to be Eastern Golden Whistlers ssp. *pectoralis*. The South-eastern Golden Whistler ssp. *youngi* occurs in Victoria and southern NSW. HANZAB indicates that Hunter Region birds to the south of the Hunter River will be intergrades of those two sub-species.

The two subspecies are very similar: *pectoralis* is slightly smaller (based on weights and the wing and tail lengths) but has a slightly larger bill. The most obvious plumage difference is the colour of the undertail coverts: in *pectoralis* they are dull white and in *youngi* they are yellow.

Local bird banders have identified many Golden Whistlers as *youngi* or *pectoralis-youngi* intergrades ("*youngi*-type").

## About the name

### Golden Whistler

For a long time, Australia's Whistlers were called Thickheads (a translation of their scientific name). In the 18th and 19th centuries, our featured species was variously known as the White-throated, Yellow-breasted and Golden-breasted Thickhead, plus more exotic names e.g. Guttural Thrush. The new 1926 Australian checklist settled on the name Golden Whistler.

### *Pachycephala pectoralis*

The various species of Whistlers all have large round heads, hence *Pachycephala* (from the Greek words *pakhus* thick and *kephale* head). The species name derives from the Latin words *pectus/pectoris* meaning "the chest".

Design: Rob Kyte at Conservation Matters Text by Alan Stuart based on information 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);  
• Ian Fraser & Jeannie Gray (2013). Australian Bird Names. A Complete Guide.

Information in this fact sheet is provided exclusively to members of the Hunter Bird Observers Club



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