

Large autumn night roosts of Rainbow Lorikeets and other lorikeet species in Raymond Terrace

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Over the past 5 years I have made systematic counts of the exceptional massing of several thousand lorikeets that peaks from late March to early May in Raymond Terrace. They roost in the CBD where massive swirling flocks are impossible to count accurately. I have been conducting counts instead from my roof on the eastern side of town, in Clyde Circuit (**Figure 1**). There I can see the lorikeets returning each afternoon from the east. The elevated position enables views across an 800 metre or so front which accounts for most, but not all, of the returning lorikeets.

It is a challenge and very tiring to count lorikeets in these numbers. They are moving fast, and it is difficult to distinguish Scaly-breasted Lorikeets *Trichoglossus chlorolepidotus* and Musk Lorikeets *Glossopsitta concinna* by any method apart from sound. Binoculars are not useful except for the most

distant flocks. My counting technique is to mark down each one hundred Rainbow Lorikeets *Trichoglossus moluccanus*, attempting to count them individually but estimating in tens, twenties or fifties where necessary when larger waves pass over. Marking down each hundred is essential to prevent losing count while also counting other species.

As it is such a challenge, I have not completed these counts often enough to provide evidence beyond showing that there are large numbers of lorikeets in April and May. So, for example, this has not been completed annually, nor has it been weekly to determine when the massing event begins in April and when it ends in May. Also, although I have lived in the town since 2002, I cannot recall which year the massing events began.

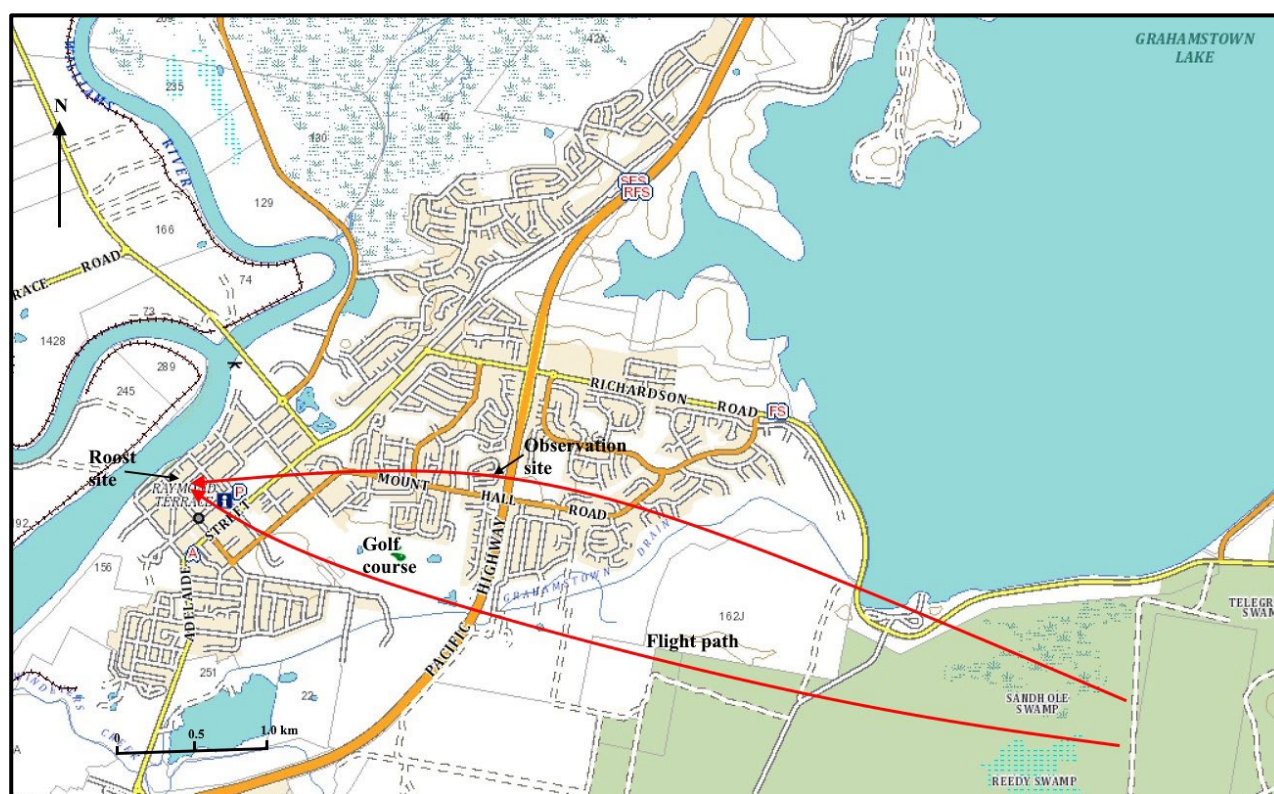


Figure 1. Location map of Raymond Terrace showing observation point, roost site, golf course and flight path from woodland swamps.

As to the massing being mainly autumn only, I can only speculate that it is a post-breeding season aggregation to take advantage of the overlapping flowering of Swamp Mahogany *Eucalyptus robusta* and Broad-leaved Paperbark *Melaleuca quin-quinerva* in the extensive swamp woodlands to the east of the town. Also in autumn, there is a large evening movement of thousands of flying foxes in the opposite direction, mostly in a tight stream passing close by my house, indicating a plentiful supply of blossom.

My earliest recollections are around the late 2000s when I noticed the lorikeets massing in a large Liquid Amber *Liquidambar sp.* that was located in Port Stephens Street beside the Veterinary Clinic and entrance to the shopping centre. I recall hearing a deafening roar of lorikeets, then seeing what I estimated to be 1000 lorikeets leaving the tree at once, without any obvious reduction in the sound emanating from the tree. I also observed a Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* diving off the Telstra tower 100 metres away and hurtling past the tree, before circling around and repeating this several times. I did not see a successful strike but I have found the heads of Rainbow Lorikeets and Common Mynas *Acridotheres tristis* underneath the tower. My recollection also was that previously Scaly-breasted Lorikeets were as plentiful as Rainbow Lorikeets, but none of my actual counts have shown particularly large numbers of them currently.

On 13 May 2025 I went down to the CBD in the afternoon to check on where the lorikeets were now massing since the Liquid Amber was removed. They are massing in an historic row of Canary Island Date

Palms *Phoenix canariensis* in Port Stephens Street and a few nearby dense trees. An additional smaller concentration is further north in eucalypts mainly around the netball courts. In years when Musk Lorikeets have also been present, I have observed them concentrating separately further south in tall eucalypts beside the Bowling Club.

Details of the counts from 2014, 2020, 2024 and 2025 are presented in **Table 1**. The arrival time sequences for the 2025 counts are presented in **Table 2**.

In 2020, the long drought had just ended, and the long catastrophic bushfire season had ended without impacting the local area in any substantial way, perhaps contributing to the exceptional count.

In addition to the Peregrine Falcon that was predated the lorikeets, two Grey Goshawks *Accipiter novaehollandiae* and a Brown Goshawk *Accipiter fasciatus* were recorded but were not seen attempting to predate the lorikeets. Two Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* and two Square-tailed Kites *Lophoictinia isura* were also observed. Other notable observations in May 2025 were counts of up to 85 Figbirds *Sphecotheres vieilloti*, 49 Noisy Friarbirds *Philemon corniculatus*, 55 Yellow-faced Honeyeaters *Lichenostomus chrysops*, 11 Brown-headed Honeyeaters *Melithreptus brevirostris*, 20 White-headed Pigeons *Columba leucomela* and 48 Topknot Pigeons *Lopholaimus antarcticus*. The small honeyeaters and Figbirds were using the tree-lined motorway as a migration path, moving east-northeast in groups of 4 to 20 birds.

Table 1. Details of the counts of lorikeets at Raymond Terrace.

Date	Start time	Duration (h, min)	Rainbow Lorikeets	Scaly-breasted Lorikeets	Musk Lorikeets
26 Feb 2014	19:30	0, 20	375	375	50
25 Mar 2020	15:00	2, 30	4953	41	31
9 May 2024	15:50	1, 30	4560	63	128
7 May 2025	15:27	1, 58	2762	125	9
24 May 2025	15:25	1, 55	1037	30	0

Table 2. Arrival time sequence for Rainbow Lorikeets returning to the roost site in 2025.

Date	7 May 2025	24 May 2025
Start	15:27	15:25
Finish	17:25	17:16
Dusk	17:08	16:57
100 birds	15:40	16:35
200 birds	15:55	16:46
300 birds	16:07	16:51
400 birds	16:15	16:55
500 birds	16:20	16:58
1000+ birds	17:00	17:16

In 2020 I could stand on a flat section of my roof for the count, but with trees growing I have moved up to the sloping section which I would not recommend for anyone without my extensive experience working on roofs. I also intend to move away from the town soon and would suggest the golf course as the next best option for future counts.