

Pacific Baza

Aviceda subcristata

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Hunter Bird
Observers Club

Affiliated with BirdLife Australia



A female Pacific Baza – note the brown wash on her neck and the extensive barring
(photo: Ray Burton)

How to pronounce it

If a group of birdwatchers saw this bird together, almost half of them would call it a “barzer” and most of the others would say “bazzzer”. A few would hedge their bets and say nothing (or else call it a Crested Hawk – an older name for this bird). Even an on-line search offers up both pronunciation options. However, the authoritative Macquarie Dictionary indicates phonetically that the correct pronunciation is “bazzzer”. It might seem an Ockerism but in fact the name comes from an Arabic word for goshawk.

General Comments

This is a distinctive mid-sized bird of prey. If seen when perched, its erectile crest, bright yellow iris, brown and white striped breast, rufous belly and under-tail render it unmistakable. Females differ from males by having a

brown wash on their neck; also their belly stripes extend much lower and they have only a small rufous vent. In flight, the Baza has long broad wings with bright rufous coverts, and prominent “fingers” on the wings. Also there is a distinctive dark sub-terminal tail band.

Juveniles have much darker overall plumage than adults. They undergo a partial moult in their first summer to Immature plumage which is similar to adults, but they have a more extensive rufous-brown wash. Overall, they look more “osprey-like”, but their crest is a give-away.

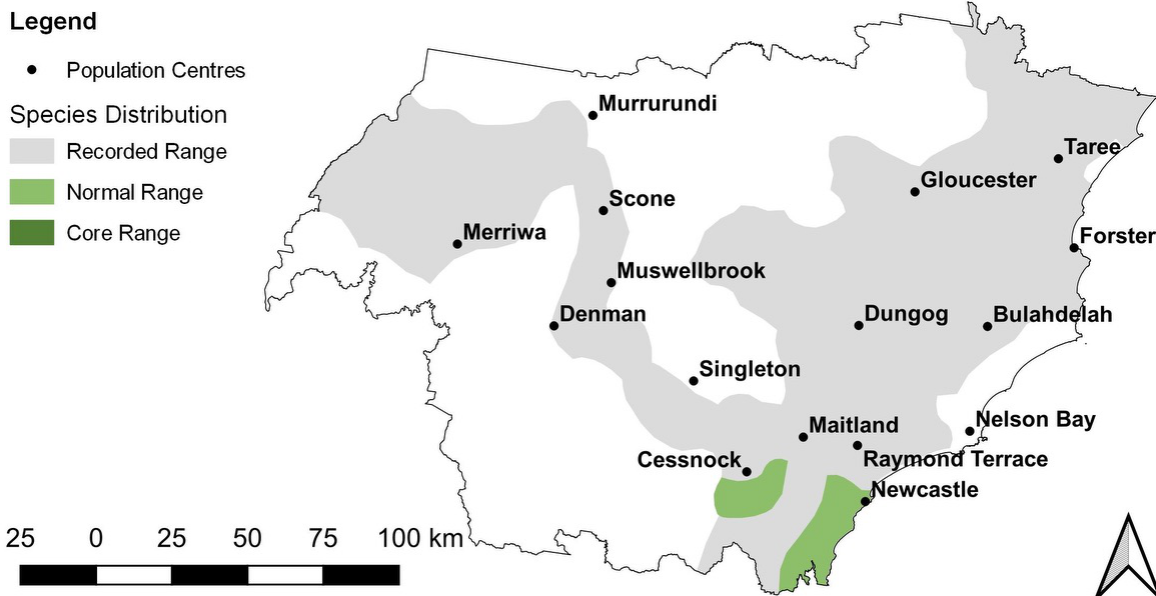
Pacific Bazas have relatively short legs, for a raptor. Thus, when perched, their tail seems quite long.



A juvenile Pacific Baza, showing the extensive fingering of the wings of this species. Note the pale underwing coverts and ventral area (photo: Rob Palazzi)

Regional Status

The Pacific Baza is a breeding resident in the Hunter Region, although some birds might depart the region after the breeding season (see below). Its stronghold is the lower Hunter woodlands but it is recorded in all well-wooded areas – with the birds showing a preference for edge habitat.

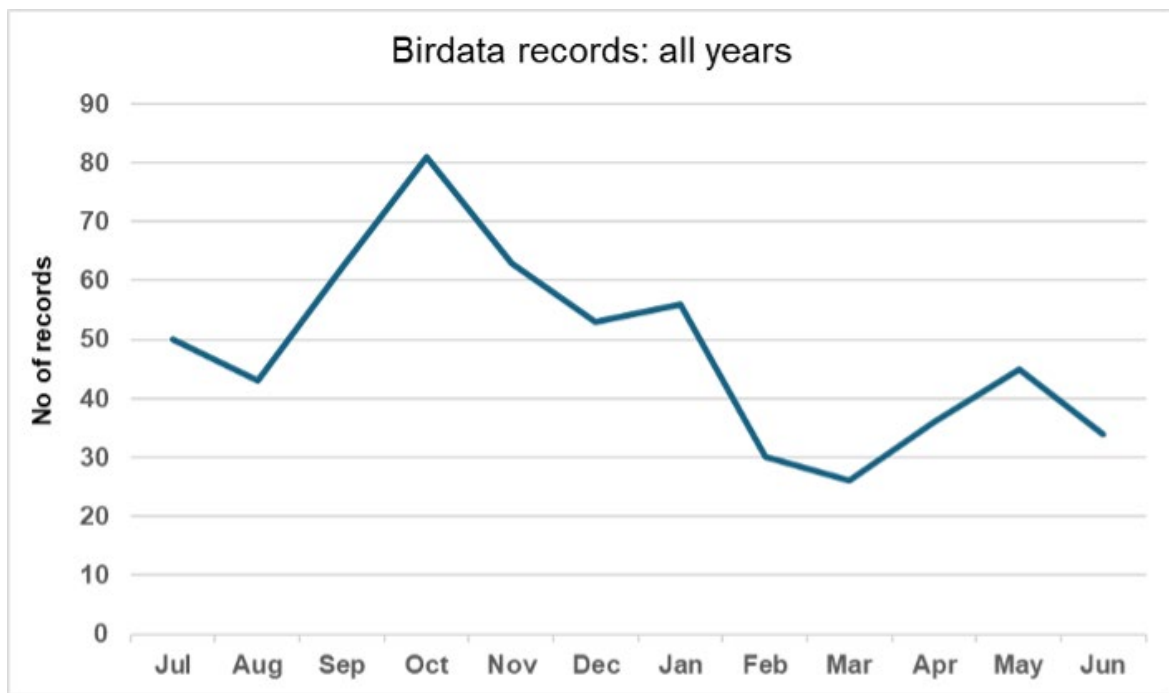


Distribution map for Pacific Baza (map by Dan Williams).

Is it migratory?

In their major study of Australian bird species movement, Griffioen and Clarke (Emu, 2002) did not identify the Pacific Baza as a migratory species. The existence of many limited-range sub-species in Indonesia and New Guinea also suggests sedentary populations. However, they are sometimes seen in groups which is thought might be related to migration. Cooper *et al.* in the NSW Atlas series proposed that part of the local population of Pacific Bazas departed NSW after the spring/summer breeding season. That might be the case in the Hunter Region. The graph below shows that records in Birdata peak in October (which is in the breeding season) and are at their lowest in February-March. However, there still are many February-March records, and the Pacific Baza's detectability might be higher in spring when it is breeding and thus actively establishing and defending territories.

At most, there can only be a partial population change after the breeding season. There are similar trends in Birdata for records of Bazas in the Newcastle LGA, although the data set for the LGA is small.



The monthly Birdata records for Pacific Baza in the Hunter Region.

About the name

Pacific Baza

As mentioned earlier, the name comes from an Arabic word for goshawk (there's a Hindi link in there too). Globally there are three species named as Bazas (with a total of 22 sub-species amongst them). Incidentally, there are another two members of the same genus (*Aviceda*) which are named as Cuckoo-hawks instead of Bazas. Our species is found in Indonesia and New Guinea, and their various islands, as well as northern/eastern Australia. That's not exactly the Pacific, just a part of it – and another species, Jerdon's Baza, inhabits other parts of South-east Asia i.e. its range is also within the Pacific Ocean.

Aviceda subcristata

The genus name means bird-killer, from the Latin *avis*, bird, and *caedere*, to cut or to kill, and the species name comes from the Latin words *sub*, below or lesser, and *cristatus*, crested. Why bird-killer? That seems somewhat of a misnomer. They do take nestlings and small birds sometimes, but the main diet is large insects (plus lizards and frogs opportunistically). And *subcristata* suggests a small crest – which seems another misnomer particularly if we compare the crest size to that of the Osprey sub-species *cristatus* (i.e. our Eastern Osprey). That bird's crest is only about half the size of the Baza's one!



Another female Pacific Baza (photo: Steve Merrett). Frogs are not the main diet but are always welcomed.

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 BirdLife Australia's HANZAB (the Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds) • Volumes 1-3 of the NSW Field Atlassers' Atlas of the Birds of NSW and the ACT • 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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