

Red-browed Finch

Neochmia temporalis

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Hunter Bird
Observers Club

Affiliated with BirdLife Australia



An adult Red-browed Finch (photo: Dawn Riggett)

General Comments

This is a small grey-green finch with a bright red rump and black tail. Males and females look similar, and both have a distinctive bright red bill and eyebrow, and crimson iris. The red bill has a black stripe above and below, and the eyebrow extends to about the ear coverts. In the breeding season, males and females share the incubation and feeding duties.

Note that juvenile and immature Red-browed Finches lack the red eyebrow and they have a dark bill. Juveniles have a dark muddy-brown iris, which progressively becomes browner in immature birds and then eventually turns crimson. Young birds acquire full adult appearance within three months of fledging.

Red-browed Finches are social birds. The pair-bond is tight all year round (for

example, regular allopreening occurs) but large flocks often forage together and several birds will usually share a roost site.

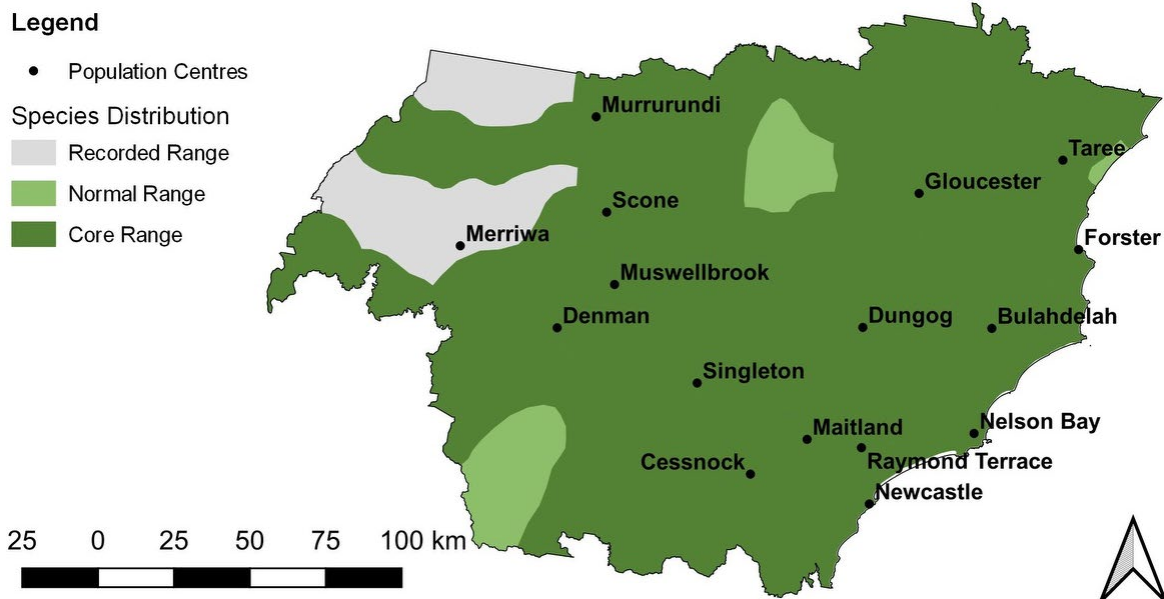


A juvenile Red-browed Finch, with a dark iris and no facial markings (photo: Rebecca Citroni).

Regional Status

The Red-browed Finch is a common breeding resident of the Hunter Region. Although it prefers areas where seeding grasses are abundant, it is found in many habitat types – heathlands, grasslands, and grassy clearing within woodlands and rainforests. In the annual bird report series, Williams (2019) suggested that the regional population might be in decline. However, that perspective was towards the end of a severe drought. Newman and Woehler have shown that Red-browed Finch numbers at Green Wattle Creek were rainfall-dependent (*The Whistler 2024*).

In early 2021, Red-browed Finches arrived on Broughton Island, and some have been recorded on the island ever since. To get there, those tiny birds had to cross 3-4km of open ocean (and, there is some evidence to suggest that there is movement by them to and from the mainland).



Distribution of the Red-browed Finch in the Hunter Region (map by Dan Williams).

Sub-species

The nominate subspecies *temporalis* (Southern Red-browed Finch) is found across the eastern and south-eastern seaboard, extending into the western slopes of the Great Dividing Range. There is also a small introduced population near Perth. The Cape York Red-browed Finch (subspecies *minor*) is paler, particularly around its face, and somewhat smaller.

Nesting or roosting?

Red-browed Finches are often reported to be breeding, because they were seen “carrying nesting material”. However, that breeding report can arise from an incorrect assumption by the observer. These finches build roosts, which are used year-round except during the breeding season. In the breeding season, both parents roost in the breeding nest, and the fledglings too, for several weeks after their fledging. Outside of the breeding season, the finches spend each night in a purpose-built roost-nest. Roost-nests are simpler than the breeding nests – for example, they lack an entrance tunnel and they usually are unlined.

About the name

Red-browed Finch

The word finch traces back to an Old English name for a small bird (*finc*). Worldwide, many birds have been named as finches because of their superficial similarity to some Old World birds.

Neochmia temporalis

The scientific name means “new bird with temples”, from the Greek word *neokhmos*, new, and the Latin word *temporalis*, to do with temples (the type found on heads, not the places of worship). Several finch species, all endemic to Australia, were assigned into the specially-created genus *Neochmia* by Latham in the early 19th Century. The species name derives from the bird’s very obvious eyebrow.



An immature Red-browed Finch (NB an adult in the background), with its eyebrow and bill colourations beginning to form (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 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 • Richard Schodde and Ian Mason (1999) • A Directory of Australian Birds (Passerines) • Klaus Immelmann (1965). Australian Finches.

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