

# Shining Bronze-Cuckoo

*Chalcites lucidus*

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Hunter Bird  
Observers Club

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A male *plagosus* Shining Bronze-Cuckoo – note the all-black bill and the narrow orbital ring. (Photo Mick Roderick).

## Description

A small green glossy bird – its iridescent green wings and back are striking features especially if the bird is seen in bright light. The underparts from throat to tail are heavily barred. The crown and back of males is iridescent green or bronze whereas for females they are dull bronze, and the barring on the underparts of the female is a little less striking (the bars being somewhat narrower and duller). Females also have a wider, paler orbital ring, and vestigial rufous/buff sections in the undertail.

Immature birds lack iridescence and generally appear duller. They have incomplete barring on the breast and belly and the face is grey-white with little or no barring.

The main potential confusion species locally is the Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo. There are four main visual differences (plus the calls are quite different). Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo has rufous sides on the upper tail, a narrower bill, and the barring on its belly is less complete. Those three are subtle differences. The main difference is that the Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo has a long dark eye stripe, with a white supercilium above it, whereas the Shining Bronze-Cuckoo has a whitish face (which has narrow barring).



Adult Shining Bronze-Cuckoo with iridescent green wing patch (Photo: Rob Palazzi).

### Regional Status

The Shining Bronze-Cuckoo has a widespread distribution in our region (see map). It uses many other species as hosts and that allows it to have plenty of options for where to seek them.

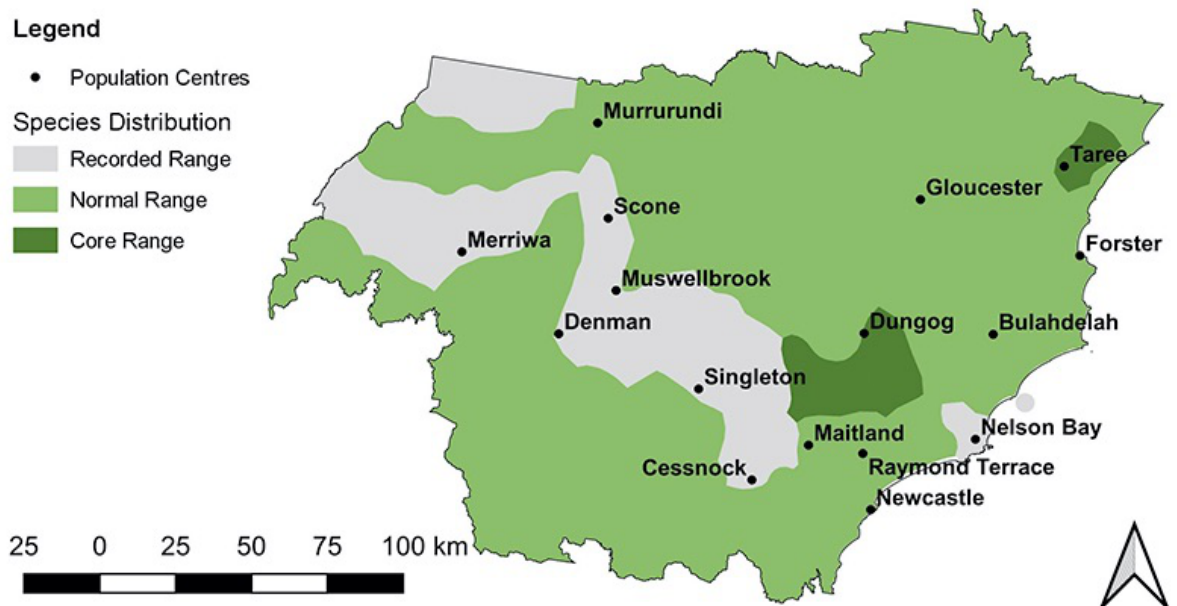
Officially it is a summer migrant (migrating northwards as far as Papua New Guinea) but winter records are common in our region (see timeline). The migration pattern is classified as “Whole East Coast” (Griffioen and Clarke *Emu-Austral Ornithology* 2002).

## Legend

- Population Centres

## Species Distribution

- Recorded Range
- Normal Range
- Core Range



Distribution map and migration timeline for Shining Bronze-Cuckoo (both produced by Dan Williams).

## Host species

Although it is known sometimes to parasitise species with open nest structures, the Shining Bronze-Cuckoo usually (about 90% of the time) selects hosts which build dome-shaped nests. Yellow-rumped Thornbills (in open country) and Brown Thornbills (in forests) are particularly popular. In data from the Nest Records Scheme, 64.4% of the host species were thornbills and 6-10% each were gerygones, scrub-wrens and fairy-wrens. The main open-nest species targeted are honeyeaters and robins.



An immature bird - note the grey face with minimal barring, and minimal iridescence on the wing (Photo: Rob Palazzi).

### Sub-species

There are four subspecies, two of which do not occur in Australia. Most of the birds in our region are the subspecies *plagosus* (Australian Shining Bronze-Cuckoo). The migratory subspecies *lucidus* (New Zealand Shining Bronze-Cuckoo) has occasionally been confirmed to be present (for example in November 2019). It probably is under-recorded because the differences between the two subspecies are small – the main differences are that a male *plagosus* has a completely dark bill whereas *lucidus* males have a blue-grey base to their lower mandible, and the crown of a male *lucidus* is green while for *plagosus* it is bronze. There is overlap of the biometrics and plumage features of females for the two subspecies and similarly for immature birds, thus generally they cannot be differentiated in the field with certainty (young *lucidus* birds are more heavily barred but it would be difficult to separate them from a female *plagosus* bird).

New Zealand birds migrate to the Solomon Islands / New Britain area and are on passage in Australia in February-April and August-November. It is thought by some authorities that they mainly pass through Queensland but, for the reasons given above, the situation is uncertain.

## About the name

### Shining Bronze-Cuckoo

This bird has had many names since European settlement. The modern name seems to be an amalgamation of three of those earlier ones – Gould named it the Shining Cuckoo and noted that others called it the Golden Cuckoo or the Bronze Cuckoo. In all cases the reference was to the iridescent greenish wing speculum.

### *Chalcites lucidus*

The genus name derives from the Greek word *khalkos* (copper or bronze) with *ites* being a standard Greek noun suffix. *Lucidus* is a Latin word meaning clear or bright, and refers to the bird's shining plumage. Thus, it is the bright bronze bird. In earlier taxonomies, some authorities named this species *Cuculus chalcites* while others opted for *Cuculus lucidus*. It seems a compromise eventually was reached.



A subspecies *lucidus* male with blue base to its lower mandible, at Mangrove Mountain in September 2019 (Photo: Steve Merrett).

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

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