

Featured Bird Series

Spangled Drongo *Dicrurus bracteatus*

Description

A medium-sized dark bird with a diagnostically long flaring tail ("fish tail"). Males and females are very similar: black, with an iridescent sheen on their upperparts, blue-green spots on head and breast, and a conspicuous red eye. They have distinctive raucous calls but also are accomplished mimics of many other species.

Juvenile birds (which possibly do not occur locally since there is no local breeding) are duller and browner than the adults, with little or no iridescence and their eye is dark brown. Immature birds have a somewhat duller appearance than the adults, and with less iridescence. Their eyes are brownish-red or sometimes yellow.

Spangled Drongos are omnivores. Although they mainly eat insects, they also take small vertebrates (especially birds), nectar and fruit. They collect most of their food aerially, by sallying. This behaviour, and their generally noisy nature, usually makes them quite conspicuous, particularly when small foraging flocks are present.



Photo: Alwyn Simple

Adult Spangled Drongo (bright red eye, black plumage, strong iridescence).

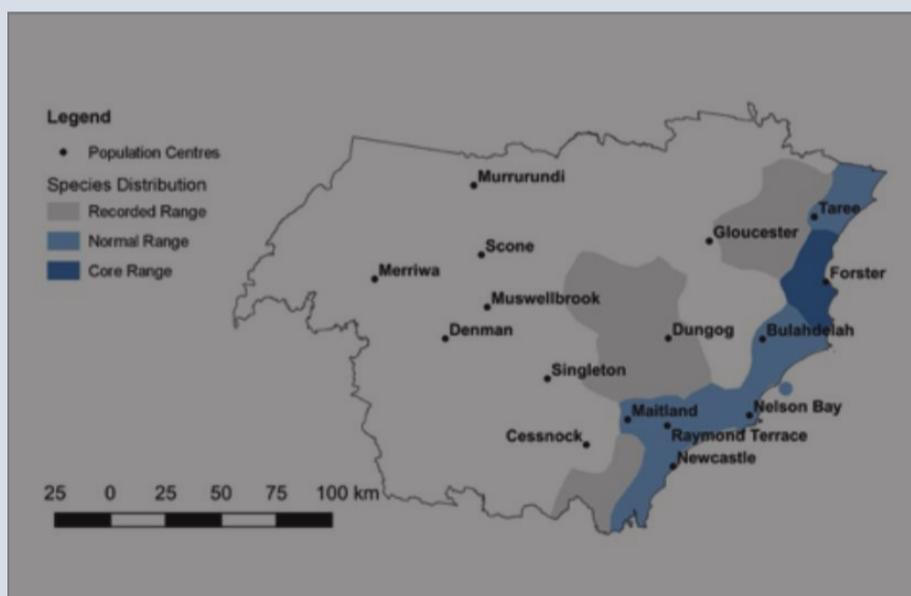
Regional Status

Although the Spangled Drongo is classified as a winter visitor to the Hunter Region, the first birds begin to arrive in mid-January and by mid-February they are widespread. Most birds depart in late August or early September but it is not uncommon for some to stay longer (see Timeline graph).

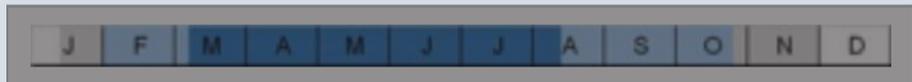
They are mainly confined to the eastern parts of our region. Inland records, from west of towns such as Taree and Maitland, are exceptional.

Our visiting Spangled Drongos mostly breed in Queensland or New Guinea; there are no local breeding records.

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



Distribution of the Spangled Drongo in the Hunter Region (map and timeline prepared by Dan Williams).



Timeline for records of Spangled Drongo



Photo: Steve Merrett

Immature Spangled Drongo (red-brown eye, duller plumage, little iridescence).



Photo: Gary Tong

Immature Spangled Drongo eating a Lewin's Honeyeater

Sub-species

Although there are four sub-species in Australia plus many more sub-species in countries to our north, we only find the nominate sub-species *bracteatus* ("Southern Spangled Drongo") in our region. The other sub-species occur in parts of northern Australia. There is very little difference although the northern sub-species are slightly smaller on average.

About the name

Spangled Drongo

The pejorative term "*drongo*" is irrelevant – that relates to a not-very-successful 1920s racehorse. Drongo is of Malagasy origin ("*drongeur*") and was first used by a Madagascar-based French zoologist for a closely-related South African bird. Gould in 1838 called our bird the Drongo-shrike (that was well before the racehorse came along). "*Spangled*" is because of the bird's glossy, spotted plumage.

Dicrurus bracteatus

The genus name derives from the Greek words *dikrour* forked and *oura* tail. The species name is based upon the Latin words *bracteatus* (gold-plated / shining like gold) and *bractea* (gold-leaf).

