

# White-winged Triller

*Lalage tricolor*

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Hunter Bird  
Observers Club

Affiliated with BirdLife Australia



A male White-winged Triller in breeding plumage (photo: Steve Merrett)

## Description

At times, this species can prove to be an identification challenge for some birdwatchers. Adult males in breeding plumage should be unmistakable – a bold black-and-white bird with an obvious white patch on the upper wing, white underparts and mostly black upperparts. The main potential confusion species (birds with white wing patches) is the Varied Triller (which locally uses different habitat, in particular rainforest rather than the woodlands favoured by White-winged Triller). The Varied Triller has rich rufous under-tail coverts, a white supercilium and two white wing bars, unlike the large single white patch of the White-winged Triller.

Females, non-breeding males and young birds can present greater identification challenges. Females essentially are a brown-and-white bird, with a muted wing pattern. There are similarities with female/juvenile Rufous

Songlarks but the latter species has a prominent rufous rump (which is visible even when perched). Males in non-breeding plumage resemble females but their rump is dark grey, their tail is black and the flight feathers on their wings are dark, which makes the wing patch stand out more strongly than for females. Young White-winged Trillers and Rufous Songlarks have streaked breasts but the streaking extends much further towards the belly in young White-winged Trillers and, overall, it is more muted.

Breeding plumage males have a dark bill. For females, non-breeding males and young birds, the upper mandible is dark grey and the lower mandible is pink-orange.

There are no recognised sub-species but our bird is closely related to the White-shouldered Triller of Indonesia and East Timor, and at one point was considered to be a subspecies of it.



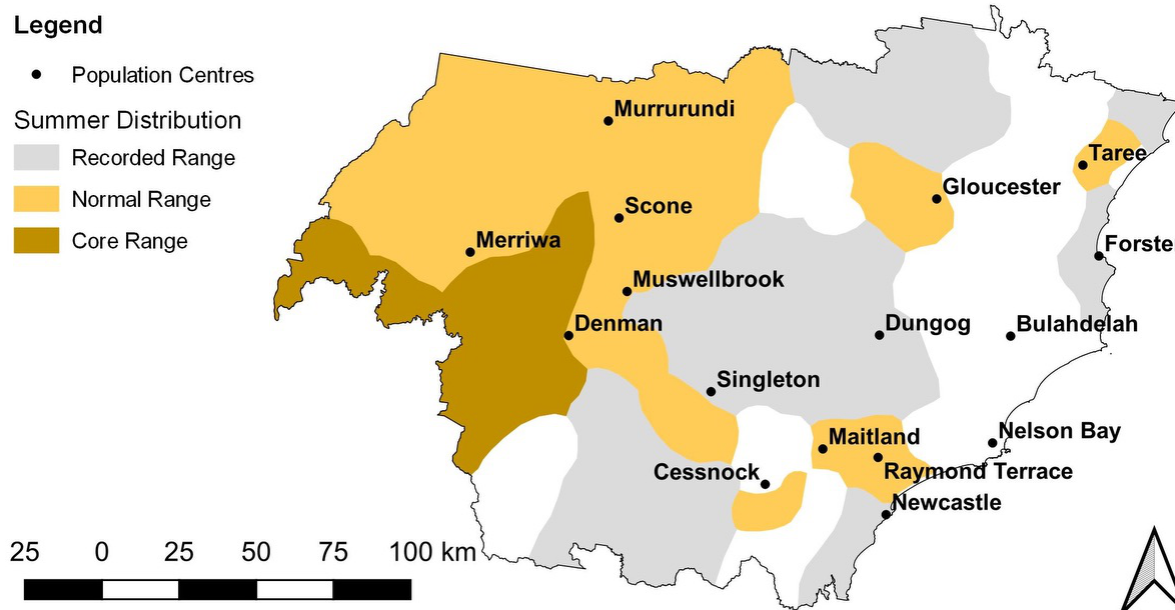
A female White-winged Triller (photo: Mick Roderick)

## Regional Status

The White-winged Triller is a summer migrant to the Hunter Region. Around about now (i.e. October) is when most birds start to arrive (although some begin to appear in September). Typically, they stay here until early March. The

stronghold is the western third of the region but they may be found in any wooded area except for high-altitude ones. There are regular breeding records.

Movements to our region may be rainfall-related. For example, in 2010 and 2021, both being years with heavy inland rainfall, there were fewer records of White-winged Triller in the Hunter. This perhaps merits deeper analysis.



Distribution map for White-winged Triller (map prepared by Dan Williams)



Timeline for White-winged Triller (Dan Williams)

## About the name

### White-winged Triller

“White-winged” is descriptive although Gould used “White-shouldered”, which perhaps was the more accurate description. However, that naming option is now not available (see below). The origin of “Triller” dates to 1926, when the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union (RAOU, precursor of BirdLife Australia) published a new Australian checklist. Before then, our bird was universally called “White-shouldered Caterpillar-eater” (the cuckoo-shrikes were also known then as caterpillar-eaters). Why did the RAOU decide to re-name it? Because at the time they decided to treat it as a subspecies of an Indonesian bird – the White-shouldered Triller *Lalage sueurii*. The two subspecies later were split (although some authorities still disagree with that decision).

### *Lalage tricolor*

“*Lalage*”, meaning “chirruper”, is from the Greek words *lalex*, a babbler or croaker, and *lalageo*, to babble or chirrup. The species name is from the Latin word *tricolor*, meaning three-coloured. Apparently grey is the third colour, based on the bird’s obvious rump colour that shows in flight. The Banded Lapwing *Vanellus tricolor* is another example of grey being the third colour to be used in creating a species name.



An immature White-winged Triller – note the streaked breast (photo: Mick Roderick)

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