

# AN ANNOTATED BIRD LIST FROM THE DAVENPORT RANGE, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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## SUMMARY

A list of bird species occupying the remote Davenport Range was compiled over a six year period (1989–1994). Several species such as the Painted Firetail and Little Woodswallow were locally confined to the range whilst other species including the Peregrine Falcon preferentially used the range for nesting or roosting sites. Information on the habitats and abundance of the avifauna of this poorly known region is presented.

## INTRODUCTION

The Davenport Range lies approximately 700 km north of Adelaide in arid South Australia (Figure 1). The range trends northerly for about 60 km parallel to the Oodnadatta Track (28°22'–28°32'S, 135°58'–136°10'E).

The two highest peaks in the Davenport Range, Mt Fox and Mt Margaret, are 410 m above mean sea level. A significant feature of the range is the Mt Margaret Plateau, to the west of Mt Margaret, which rises about 250 m above the surrounding plains and slopes down gently westwards and northwards. The quartzite of this plateau is more resistant to erosion than the surrounding Precambrian dolomite, sandstone and shale sediments which have formed much of the remainder of the range (Ambrose *et al.* 1981).

Drainage from the Davenport Range is predominantly easterly with the Bulldog, Levi and Hawker Creeks feeding the Neales River which flows into Lake Eyre North, 80 km to the east. Areas along the upper headwaters of these creeks contain a few rock pools but generally there is little free-standing water. The south-western slopes of the range form part of the Anna Creek catchment which flows into Lake Eyre South, and the north-western slopes drain into Peake Creek, which flows into Lake Eyre North. Along the faulted eastern margin of the range are several artesian springs including Edith and Tarlton Springs (Ambrose *et al.* 1981) and there are also artesian springs east of the range including Levi and Hawker Springs.

The vegetation of the Davenport Range is open woodland dominated by mulga and chenopods. Rocky slopes support *Acacia* sp. aff. *stowardii*,

*Eremophila freelingii*, *E. rotundifolia* and *Atriplex vesicaria* with patches of *Acacia aneura*, *Hakea leucoptera*, *Senna artemisioides* ssp. *oligophylla* and *Indigofera basedowii*. The creeks are lined with *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* var. *obtusata*, *Eucalyptus coolibah* and/or *Santalum lanceolatum*, *Pittosporum phylliraeoides*, *Acacia tetragonophylla* and *Acacia salicina*. The chenopod plains consist of *Maireana georgei*, *M. pyramidata*, *Rhagodia spinescens*, *Atriplex* spp., *Sclerolaena* spp., *Frankenia* spp., *Abutilon* spp. and *Osteocarpum* sp. Patches of spinifex *Triodia*

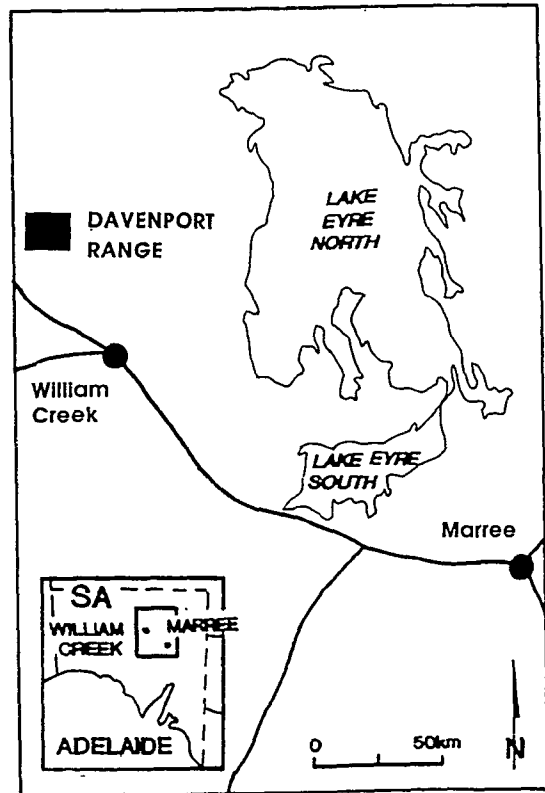


Figure 1. Location of the Davenport Range in northern South Australia.

*irritans* occur about Mt Margaret and on the steep rocky slopes of the headwaters of the Bulldog Creek. The Mt Margaret Plateau and the range-tops without *Triodia* consist of a sparse chenopod shrubland dominated by *Sclerolaena* spp.

Beef cattle grazing is the predominant land use of the region but, as few stock venture into the range, there is no domestic grazing impact on the bird species observed. However, a sizeable population of feral animals, including donkeys, rabbits, cats and foxes, inhabit the area and have presumably altered the ecosystem.

The bird life of the Davenport Range is poorly known due to a lack of survey work. The range is not immediately obvious from the nearest major road and access through the range is only possible on foot. The observations of the birds of the Davenport Range detailed below were made while the authors bushwalked and camped throughout the range in the months of July, August and October from 1989 to 1993 and in December 1994.

The nomenclature follows Schodde *et al.* (1978).

#### ANNOTATED LIST

##### EMU

*Dromaius novaehollandiae*

Infrequent visitor along the foothills.

##### COLLARED SPARROWHAWK

*Accipiter cirrhocephalus*

A pair observed in December 1994 collecting twigs by breaking them off dead acacia branches near semi-permanent spring water.

##### BROWN GOSHAWK

*Accipiter fasciatus*

In August 1990 a resident pair was observed with two juveniles. Typically isolated individuals were recorded throughout the range. In December 1994 a single bird was observed flying into *Acacia tetragonophylla* shrubs while hunting Zebra Finches.

##### BLACK KITE

*Milvus migrans*

Apparently sparse in the cooler months with only infrequent and isolated sightings. However, in December 1994 several groups of Black Kites were seen soaring over rock holes. This species is much more common around stations and towns in the western Lake Eyre region.

##### WHISTLING KITE

*Haliastur sphenurus*

Not recorded in any of the winter visits but a pair was observed in December 1994 soaring and calling overhead.

##### WEDGE-TAILED EAGLE

*Aquila audax*

The Davenport Range supports a relatively large population of this species. Their nests are predominantly sited in large eucalypts in the stony creek beds but a single (uninhabited) nest was located on the ground on top of a prominent peak within the range. The refuse carcasses at all nest sites indicate a predominant diet of rabbit. Numerous juvenile Wedge-tailed Eagles have been sighted.

##### BROWN FALCON

*Falco berigora*

Widespread throughout the range, frequently seen hunting Zebra Finches near waters.

##### BLACK FALCON

*Falco subniger*

A single bird recorded hunting small unidentified birds (probably Zebra Finches) in August 1990.

##### AUSTRALIAN KESTREL

*Falco cenchroides*

Common resident throughout the range.

##### PEREGRINE FALCON

*Falco peregrinus*

A pair of this species has been repeatedly sighted at a particular locality within the range since 1991. Two roost sites have been recorded within 0.5 km of each other and two normal and one reject egg were vigorously defended by the adult birds at one of these sites. These sightings probably represent the same pair although this has not been confirmed. On many occasions, the male was seen bringing captured Zebra Finches back to the roost on a cliff face, possibly indicating a fledgling population. On another occasion the female was observed 'ambushing' flocks of Budgerigars as they flew up the steep-sided rocky creek adjacent to her roost. The authors observed this display for nearly one hour and recorded the striking of three birds which fell to the ground, injured but not dead. None of these injured birds was collected (at least while the authors were present) by the falcon which eventually ceased its hunt and disappeared from view.

## STUBBLE QUAIL

*Coturnix novaezealandiae*

Recorded on the Margaret Plateau in August 1992, October 1993 and December 1994.

## CRESTED PIGEON

*Ocyphaps lophotes*

Numerous residents. Visiting birds also frequently observed in large ( $\leq 50$ ) groups at watering points.

## COMMON BRONZEWING

*Phaps chalcoptera*

Sparse but widespread throughout the range. Usually seen drinking at waters just on dark or after being flushed during the day, usually high up in thickly vegetated and rocky gutters. Perhaps significantly, no records of this species were made on the surrounding plains.

## DIAMOND DOVE

*Geopelia cuneata*

Common about waters.

## PEACEFUL DOVE

*Geopelia striata*

Infrequent with only two recordings made about water bodies.

## GALAH

*Cacatua roseicapilla*

Large resident population throughout the range.

## LITTLE CORELLA

*Cacatua sanguinea*

Large resident population. Nesting was typically in small holes at the top of cliff faces.

## PORT LINCOLN RINGNECK PARROT

*Barnardius zonarius*

Occasional visiting groups observed moving along the eucalypt-lined creeks on each visit to the range. Common in red gum creeks on both sides of the range.

## BUDGERIGAR

*Melopsittacus undulatus*

Flocks observed flying through eucalypt-lined creeks and steep rocky gullies in the wetter seasons.

## HORSFIELD'S BRONZE-CUCKOO

*Chrysococcyx basalis*

Several isolated birds throughout the range on each visit.

## RED-BACKED KINGFISHER

*Halcyon pyrrhopygia*

Pairs infrequently observed near semi-permanent waters during both the cool and hot months.

## RAINBOW BEE-EATER

*Merops ornatus*

Several observed hunting insects in December 1994 along the eucalypt-lined creeks within the range.

## BARN OWL

*Tyto alba*

Often heard at night. Roosts in small caves in rocky gullies. Pellets contain a great diversity of mammals including *Leggadina*, *Sminthopsis*, *Pseudomys*, *Notomys* and *Mus* species. Older pellets appear to be dominated by *Rattus villosissimus*, which spread through the region in 1973-75 (Read 1994), and possibly in earlier good seasons. This diet conforms with the previously recorded diet of Barn Owls from the west of Lake Eyre (Morton and Martin 1979).

## SOUTHERN BOOBOOK

*Ninox novaeseelandiae*

Sparse. Two separate birds were disturbed at their roosts in steep and thickly vegetated rocky gutters, during a winter and summer visit.

## SPOTTED NIGHTJAR

*Caprimulgus guttatus*

Frequently heard throughout the range on all visits.

## AUSTRALIAN OWLET-NIGHTJAR

*Aegotheles cristatus*

Frequently heard on all visits. Most visual records were of the grey phase. The red phase was observed only twice in steep rocky cliff habitat, once roosting in the hollow of a red gum branch and the other time in a rock crevice.

## TAWNY FROGMOUTH

*Podargus strigoides*

Frequently heard at night on each visit throughout the range.

## FAIRY MARTIN

*Cecropis ariel*

Several observed nesting under trees and cliff overhangs throughout the range during visits in the cooler months. Many abandoned nests.

## TREE MARTIN

*Cecropis nigricans*

Several recorded in August 1990 amongst eucalypt trees where creeks exit the range.

## RUFIOUS SONGLARK

*Cinchorhamphus mathewsi*

Common in wetter years where thick vegetation exists about the foothills.

## RICHARD'S PIPIT

*Anthus novaeseelandiae*

Sparse resident of Margaret Plateau near Mt Fox.

## GROUND CUCKOO-SHRIKE

*Coracina maxima*

A group of five adult birds recorded in a eucalypt-lined creek and adjoining floodplain within the confines of the range, December 1994.

## BLACK-FACED CUCKOO-SHRIKE

*Coracina novaehollandiae*

Numerous records of individuals and pairs. A large group was observed in eucalypt-lined creeks in August 1990.

## RED-CAPPED ROBIN

*Petroica goodenovii*

Single male seen near spring water, August 1990.

## HOODED ROBIN

*Melanodryas cucullata*

Pairs frequently observed amongst *Acacia* sp. aff. *stowardii* near waters. Juveniles observed in December 1994 with family group.

## CRESTED BELLBIRD

*Oreoica gutturalis*

Sparsely distributed throughout the range, typically at the base of rocky hills and slopes.

## WILLIE WAGTAIL

*Rhipidura leucophrys*

Numerous and resident throughout the range.

## CHIRRUPING WEDGEBILL

*Psophodes cristatus*

Several resident pairs were observed, often in *Acacia victoriae* trees on the plains adjacent to the foothills. The authors' nearest record of the Chiming Wedgebill *P. occidentalis* is over 200 km to the north, near the Hamilton Station homestead.

## CINNAMON QUAIL-THRUSH

*Cinlosoma cinnamomeum*

Sparse on rocky slopes and plains throughout the range.

## WHITE-BROWED BABBLER

*Pomatostomus superciliosus*

A single record of a small group in December 1994 in the foothills in a stony creek containing various acacias.

## WHITE-WINGED FAIRY-WREN

*Malurus leucopterus*

Several resident groups were observed amongst *Maireana* and *Acacia* spp. on each visit throughout the range.

## VARIEGATED FAIRY-WREN

*Malurus lamberti*

Numerous family groups resident in dense vegetation throughout the range.

## THICK-BILLED GRASSWREN

*Amytornis textilis*

Resident population in *Maireana* communities on the Hawker Creek floodplain at the foot of the range.

## CALAMANTHUS

*Sericornis fuliginosus*

A pair was observed August 1990 beside the Mount Fox wooden trigonometric station on an open elevated plateau dominated by *Sclerolaena* spp.

## CHESTNUT-RUMPED THORNBILL

*Acanthiza uropygialis*

A pair was recorded in *Acacia* sp. aff. *stowardii* on a stony ridge near water, June 1989.

## SPINY-CHEEKED HONEYEATER

*Acanthogenys rufogularis*

Single bird sightings predominated in the cooler months. A large group of 10+ birds was recorded near a spring source in December 1994, feeding amongst a thicket of flowering *Eremophila longifolia*.

## YELLOW-THROATED MINER

*Manorina flavigula*

Small groups frequently recorded near springs and along the eucalypt-lined creeks.

## SINGING HONEYEATER

*Lichenostomus virescens*

Numerous resident birds throughout the range. In December 1994 several individuals were feeding on the arils of *Acacia salicina* pods.

## WHITE-PLUMED HONEYEATER

*Lichenostomus penicillatus*

Numerous resident birds restricted to the eucalypt-lined creeks.

## PIED HONEYEATER

*Certhionyx variegatus*

Single bird recorded in July 1989, beside a temporary rock pool.

## BLACK HONEYEATER

*Certhionyx niger*

Three small immature *Certhionyx* honeyeaters were observed in a sparsely vegetated gutter in October 1993. The small size, grey upper breast and lack of discernible pale wing coverts suggest that the Black Honeyeater is an uncommon visitor to the region.

## MISTLETOEBIRD

*Dicaeum hirundinaceum*

Numerous recordings throughout the range. Observed feeding on *Amyema preissii*, *Lysiana exocarpi* and *L. subfalcata*.

## RED-BROWED PARDALOTE

*Pardalotus rubricatus*

Numerous resident birds observed during the cooler months at waters along eucalypt-lined creeks. Not recorded in December 1994.

## PAINTED FIRETAIL

*Emblema picta*

Numerous resident birds observed on each visit frequenting rock pools or springs. Nesting sites were located on steep rocky *Triodia*-covered slopes about Mt Margaret and the Bulldog Creek headwaters in September 1993. This record may represent the most southern known resident population of this species. During severe drought conditions this species probably drinks at the permanent semi-artesian Tarlton Spring, 8 km SSE of Mt Margaret.

## ZEBRA FINCH

*Poephila guttata*

Numerous and resident throughout the range.

## AUSTRALIAN MAGPIE-LARK

*Grallina cyanoleuca*

One bird recorded in winter. In December 1994, several birds recorded drinking at springs.

## LITTLE WOODSWALLOW

*Artamus minor*

Numerous records on all visits suggest a large resident population throughout the range. This species inhabits steep and high rocky cliffs, both within and along the edge of the range.

## BLACK-FACED WOODSWALLOW

*Artamus cinereus*

Common resident throughout the range, especially about the outer perimeter.

## AUSTRALIAN MAGPIE

*Gymnorhina tibicen*

Resident pairs throughout the range.

## LITTLE CROW

*Corvus bennetti*

Large groups observed on several occasions throughout the range.

## AUSTRALIAN RAVEN

*Corvus coronoides*

Numerous records of single birds and large groups throughout the range, especially in the foothills and vegetated gutters leaving the range.

## DISCUSSION

The observations presented in this article provide information on 61 bird species recorded in the Davenport Range. Although most of these species are widespread in the Lake Eyre region, several are restricted to ranges.

Painted Firetails are locally common within the range. Their habitat in the headwaters of the Bulldog Creek and about Mt Margaret consists of rocky hills vegetated with *Eremophila* sp. and *Triodia irritans* which is typical of the habitat of the Painted Firetail elsewhere (Joseph 1975).

An extensive pocket of *Triodia* within the Davenport Range is the only known population within a 150 km radius and this places some significance on the resident Painted Firetail population. Its isolation from the nearest known resident population in the Musgrave Ranges (Close and Jaensch 1984) is particularly noteworthy. All records of Painted Firetails to the south in the

Flinders and Gawler Ranges (Reader's Digest 1986), Woomera (Bell 1976), Hermit Hill (J. Read. pers. obs.), and North Creek (Anna Creek Station) region (P.G. and I.G. pers. obs. 1992) are thought to be vagrant individuals (Joseph 1975), although nesting has been recorded at Arkaroola (Cox 1976). The authors have looked without success for other likely species that may occur on *Triodia*-covered rocky slopes, such as the Striated Grasswren *Amytornis striatus* and the Dusky Grasswren *Amytornis purnelli*.

The only other species which is apparently restricted to the range is the Little Woodswallow. This species replaces the Black-faced Woodswallow around cliff lines and steep hills in both the Davenport Range and the Denison Range to the north. Most other South Australian records of Little Woodswallows are from gorges or hilly country (Joseph 1986). Neither the Painted Firetail nor the Little Woodswallow were recorded in a survey of the birds of the Willouran Ranges (Badman 1981) which lie approximately 200 km to the south-east of the Davenport Range.

The Peregrine Falcon roosts and nests in small caves and platforms high on cliffs and hunts out on the surrounding plains. Likewise other birds, such as Common Bronzings and Red-backed Kingfishers are more common in the range than on the surrounding plains, presumably due to water sources and suitable nesting sites.

Perhaps significantly, the only red phase Owlet Nightjar records in the region were made in the Davenport Range, although several grey phase forms were seen both within and outside of the hilly country.

Other notable records include the uncommon Black Falcon, Brown Goshawk and Hooded Robin and the nomadic Pied and Black Honeyeaters. Since there is no published information on the avifauna of this region, it is clear that further searches for these and other species are warranted.

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