

THE BIRDS OF MUNYAROO CONSERVATION PARK AND ADJOINING COAST

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ABSTRACT

One hundred and nine bird species were recorded at Munyaroo Conservation Park, 42 km south of Whyalla, on eleven 2–3 day visits from 1985 to 1999. Here, several birds are near the extremity of their ranges, including the Rufous Treecreeper *Climacteris rufa*, Splendid Fairy-wren *M. splendens*, Blue-breasted Fairy-wren *Malurus pulcherrimus*, Redthroat *Pyrholaemus brunneus*, Western Yellow Robin *Eopsaltria griseogularis* and Grey-shrike Thrush *Colluricincla harmonica rufiventris*. Two species appear to have declined during the survey period, namely Southern Whiteface *Aphelocephala leucopsis* and Red-capped Robin *Petroica goodenovii*.

INTRODUCTION

Munyaroo Conservation Park lies on the east coast of Eyre Peninsula, 42 km S of Whyalla (33°36'S, 137°25'E, see Figure 1). Munyaroo has an area of 12,334 ha and was dedicated in 1977. Prior to dedication the park was grazed and a small area near the coast was used for wheat farming in the 1920s (C. Garrett pers. comm.). The ruins of a farmhouse and loading ramp for ketches are still visible and attest to this activity.

There are few Conservation Parks in this region of the peninsula and Munyaroo is a little-visited park, partly because it is not on a major highway. There are few published ornithological records from Munyaroo Conservation Park, although the South Australian Ornithological Association held a campout there in 1985. Records from this campout are included in this paper.

Munyaroo Conservation Park straddles the vegetation boundary between mallee in the south and western myall *Acacia papyrocarpa* woodland and pearl bluebush *Maireana sedifolia* plains to the north. The park runs from an ironstone escarpment, the Randall Fault line, in the central west down to an undulating sandy plain. The sand ridges generally run NW to SE and are vegetated with ridge-fruit mallee *Eucalyptus incrassata*, grass-leaf hakea *Hakea francisiana*, triodia *Triodia irritans* and green tea-tree *Leptospermum coriaceum*. The swales are dominated by a variety of mallee eucalypts with a mixed understorey of emubushes

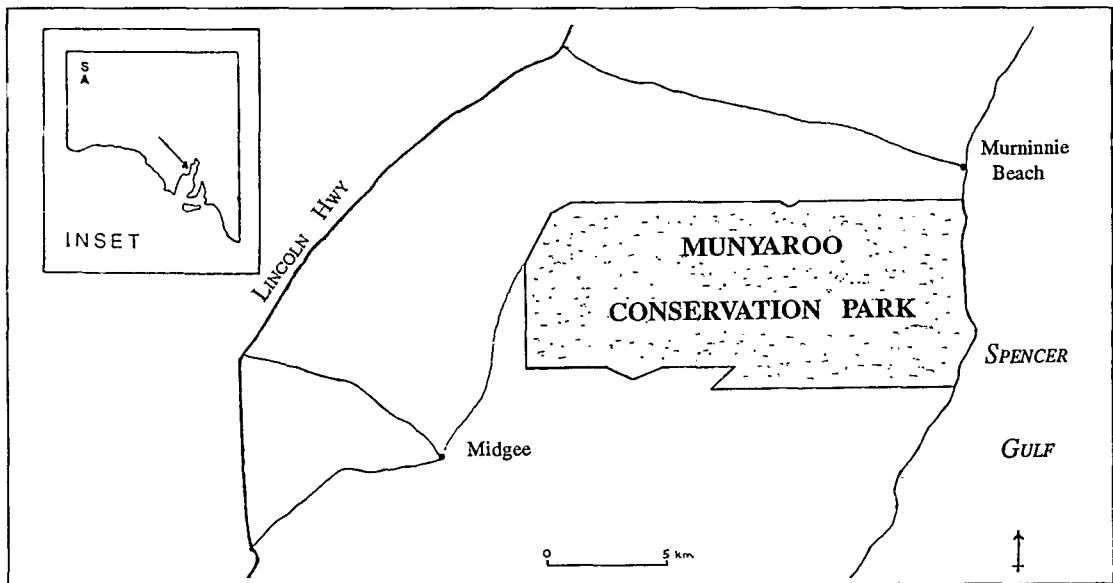


Figure 1. Map of Munyaroo Conservation Park (Source: Department for Environment and Heritage).

Eremophila spp., daisy bush *Olearia* sp. and chenopods. There is an area dominated by southern cypress pine *Callitris gracilis* in the north-west of the park. There are also a number of granite rises in the west of the park, where heath species predominate, particularly broom-bush *Melaleuca uncinata*. Near the coast are saline flats with samphire *Halosarcia* sp. and nitre-bush *Nitraria billardierei*.

METHODS

The birds listed in the Appendix were recorded from eleven visits, each of two to three days duration, to the eastern part of Munyaroo Conservation Park and centred on a camp site about 3 km from the coast. These visits occurred from 1985 to 1999, between July and November, and the dates mentioned in the list refer to the first day of each visit.

DISCUSSION

A total of 106 native and three introduced bird species were recorded in this survey of Munyaroo Conservation Park. Of the 106 native birds, 85 were terrestrial and 21 were waterbirds or birds of coastal areas. An analysis of the terrestrial bird species from this area is interesting for two reasons. The first reason is related to Munyaroo's position at the junction of the mallee/myall woodland interface, where species representative of the two different habitats would be expected to occur together or nearby. This could also be interpreted as the occurrence of species which are at the northern or southern extremities of their range. This is borne out by the juxtaposition of species like the Blue-breasted Fairy-wren *Malurus pulcherrimus*, which is close to its northern extremity, and the Splendid Fairy-wren *Malurus splendens*, which is close to its southern limit at Munyaroo. Another species that is near its southern extent in Munyaroo is the Redthroat *Pyrrholaemus brunneus* (Schodde and Mason 1999). This is supported by the paucity of records from the park, with only one record from the survey and a breeding record from south of the park in October 1987.

The second reason is due to Munyaroo being at the eastern extremity of Eyre Peninsula and adjacent to the Eyrean Barrier, which runs north from the head of Spencer Gulf and along western outliers of the Flinders Ranges to the Lake Eyre

Basin (Schodde 1999). This is a zoo-geographic barrier that was important in bird evolution on the Australian continent and in present times marks the limit of some bird species and races. Thus some birds recorded in Munyaroo would be expected to be at or near their eastern-most limit and this is the case with the Rufous Treecreeper *Climacteris rufa*, the western form of the Grey Shrike-thrush *Colluricincla harmonica rufiventris* and the Western Yellow Robin *Eopsaltria griseogularis* (Schodde and Mason 1999). The situation with the Splendid Fairy-wren is more complicated as Munyaroo lies in the zone of intergradation between two ultrataxa—*Malurus splendens musgravi* to the west and *M. s. melanotus* to the east. Schodde and Mason (1999) point out that the race *M. s. callainus*, long thought to be the bird that occurred in western South Australia, is intergradient between *melanotus* and *musgravi* and therefore no longer identifiable.

Tree hollows are scarce and small in Munyaroo and thus hollow-nesting birds might be expected to be scarce there. This was not the case for two parrot species, the Australian Ringneck *Barnardius zonarius* and the Mulga Parrot *Psephotus varius*, which were recorded as moderately common in the park. However, not surprisingly, no evidence of breeding was found. Rufous Treecreeper, another hollow-nester, was recorded on only one occasion from the park, although they are common further west, e.g. in Sinclair Gap c. 35 km NNW and Lake Gillies Conservation Park c. 60 km NW, where there are bigger eucalypts providing nesting hollows. The treecreeper's rarity in Munyaroo could be due either to the lack of suitable hollows or to less than optimal habitat.

Birds of prey were scarce in Munyaroo, with only five species being recorded and four of these having only one to three records over the 14 years. Wedge-tailed Eagles *Aquila audax* were more common on the open plain to the north of the park, so it is likely that the scarcity of most raptors is due to unsuitable habitat in the park. Records of nomadic irruptive bird species were also fairly scarce in Munyaroo, with the Crimson Chat *Epthianura tricolor* and Orange Chat *E. aurifrons* being the only representatives of this group. They were seen only in 1985 in the park, however they bred as far south as Port Neill c. 120 km SW in that year and in several years since. Their typical pattern is to

arrive in October and leave in December after breeding.

Of concern are the reported declines in Southern Whiteface *Aphelocephala leucopsis* and Red-capped Robin *Petroica goodenovii*. While the evidence is fairly anecdotal from Munyaroo Conservation Park, these two species have suffered declines in abundance and distribution in other parts of Australia (Paton, Carpenter and Sinclair 1994; Reid 2000; Taylor 2001). Nevertheless it is difficult to be certain whether the perceived decline is due to subtle habitat changes within the park or due to broader landscape changes. This example shows the benefit of keeping bird records from the same area over long periods of time and the importance of attempting to quantify the birds recorded.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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APPENDIX

The following birds have been recorded at Munyaroo Conservation Park. * = an introduced bird species.

- Emu *Dromaius novaehollandiae*. A few sightings in thick scrub; footprints and scats on tracks on all visits.
- Malleefowl *Leipoa ocellata*. Many mounds in central area of park (>5 km from coast), in areas of higher sand ridges, thicker scrub and a wider variety of shrubs. Several mounds known to be active in 1997 and 1998, and sightings of birds on previous visits. Suspended activity at mounds visited in July 1999, possibly due to dry year.
- Stubble Quail *Coturnix pectoralis*. One sighting on 13/10/98 in clearing near the coast.
- Grey Teal *Anas gracilis*. 6 birds on sea on 5/10/94.
- Little Pied Cormorant *Phalacrocorax melanoleucos*. Small numbers on all visits.
- Pied Cormorant *Phalacrocorax varius*. Small numbers on all visits.
- Australian Pelican *Pelecanus conspicillatus*. Up to 6 birds on several visits; 20 birds on 13/7/99.
- White-faced Heron *Egretta novaehollandiae*. 1 bird on beach on 5/10/94.
- Collared Sparrowhawk *Accipiter cirrhocephalus*. A pair or single birds on all visits; a breeding record on 13/10/85.
- Wedge-tailed Eagle *Aquila audax*. 1 bird on 28/8/87.
- Little Eagle *Hieraaetus morphnoides*. A breeding pair on 13/10/85 and a single bird on 28/8/87.
- Brown Falcon *Falco berigora*. Recorded on 13/10/85 & 5/10/94.
- Nankeen Kestrel *Falco cenchroides*. Recorded on 13/10/85, 28/8/87 & 5/10/94.
- Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*. One obviously sick bird wandering on mud flats on 13/10/85.
- Little Button-quail *Turnix velox*. 1 bird in thick scrub on 5/10/94.
- Painted Button-quail *Turnix varia*. 1 bird on 10/7/98.
- Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*. 2-3 birds on beach on most visits.
- Grey-tailed Tattler *Heteroscelus brevipes*. 10-20 birds feeding on tidal flats on 13/10/85 & 28/8/87.

- Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*. A few records of small numbers.
- Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris*. 1 bird on 13/10/85.
- Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis*. Small groups on 13/10/85 & 5/10/94.
- Pied Oystercatcher *Haematopus longirostris*. 2 birds on 13/10/85 & 8 birds on 28/10/87.
- Sooty Oystercatcher *Haematopus fuliginosus*. Pairs on 13/10/85, 28/8/87 & 5/10/94.
- Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*. 5 birds on 28/8/87 and single birds on 13/10/85 & 5/10/94.
- Red-capped Plover *Charadrius ruficapillus*. A few birds on 13/10/85.
- Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii*. 1 bird with a group of stints on 5/10/94.
- Banded Lapwing *Vanellus tricolor*. Sightings in coastal samphire on 5/10/94, 19/10/94 & 20/8/98.
- Pacific Gull *Larus pacificus*. 2-3 birds seen on most visits.
- Silver Gull *Larus novaehollandiae*. Always present in small numbers.
- Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia*. 1 bird on 13/10/85, 28/8/87 & 5/10/94.
- Crested Tern *Sterna bergii*. Small groups of 2-10 birds seen scattered along coast.
- Fairy Tern *Sterna nereis*. Small numbers seen on some visits.
- *Rock Dove *Columba livia*. 1 bird on 13/10/85.
- Common Bronzewing *Phaps chalcoptera*. Single birds scattered throughout scrub seen on all visits. Drinks at dawn and dusk when rain falls or dew collects on old shed and tank in the park and dams outside the park.
- Crested Pigeon *Ocyphaps lophotes*. 3-4 birds seen on every visit in park in open country on northern boundary.
- Galah *Cacatua roseicapilla*. Small numbers of birds, usually less than six, seen on every visit.
- Cockatiel *Nymphicus hollandicus*. 6 birds on 13/10/85 & 2 birds on 19/10/89.
- Purple-crowned Lorikeet *Glossopsitta porphyrocephala*. Common in small groups especially when eucalypts were flowering.
- Australian Ringneck *Barnardius zonarius*. Moderately common.
- Mulga Parrot *Psephotus varius*. Moderately common.
- Pallid Cuckoo *Cuculus pallidus*. Small numbers seen in every year.
- Fan-tailed Cuckoo *Cacomantis flabelliformis*. Small numbers seen in every year.
- Black-eared Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx osculans*. Small numbers seen in every year.
- Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx basalus*. Small numbers seen in every year.
- Southern Boobook *Ninox novaeseelandiae*. 1 bird heard on 13/10/85.
- Barn Owl *Tyto alba*. 1 bird heard on 20/8/98.
- Spotted Nightjar *Eurostopodus argus*. Single birds heard on 20/8/89 & 19/10/98.
- Australian Owlet-nightjar *Aegotheles cristatus*. Seen or heard on all visits.
- Rainbow Bee-eater *Merops ornatus*. Common in spring/summer in flocks of 20 birds.
- Rufous Treecreeper *Climacteris rufa*. 1 bird on 13/10/85.
- Splendid Fairy-wren *Malurus splendens*. The race *callainus* is common in the park, especially in open areas with chenopods and nitre-bush, where it breeds.
- Blue-breasted Fairy-wren *Malurus pulcherrimus*. Common in the mallee, whereas the two other fairy-wren species are more common in non-eucalypt habitat.
- White-winged Fairy-wren *Malurus leucopterus*. Common in park in saline areas near coast in samphire and nitre-bush and in open areas with saltbush *Atriplex* sp., bluebush and broom emubush *Eremophila scoparia*.
- Spotted Pardalote *Pardalotus punctatus*. Common. Seen or heard on all visits.
- Striated Pardalote *Pardalotus striatus*. Common. Seen on all visits, with greater numbers seen when eucalypts are flowering heavily.
- Shy Heathwren *Hylacola cauta*. Single birds seen on most visits.
- Redthroat *Pyrrholaemus brunneus*. A breeding record from the south of the park in October 1987.
- Weebill *Smicromis brevirostris*. Common in flowering eucalypts. Seen on every visit.
- Inland Thornbill *Acanthiza apicalis*. Common, seen on every visit, especially in higher sand ridges with grass-leaf hakea.
- Chestnut-rumped Thornbill *Acanthiza uropygialis*. Uncommon. A few birds seen on some visits.
- Yellow-rumped Thornbill *Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*. Small groups of 10-15 seen in open areas on all visits.
- Southern Whiteface *Aphelocephala leucopsis*. A few on northern boundary of park, with numbers declining in recent years.
- Red Wattlebird *Anthochaera carunculata*. Common. Many seen on all visits.
- Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater *Acanthagenys rufogularis*. Very common. Many birds seen or heard at all times of the day when moving through the bush.
- Yellow-throated Miner *Manorina flavigula*. Common. 4-6 groups of 20-30 birds scattered throughout the scrub.
- Singing Honeyeater *Lichenostomus virescens*. Common. Small numbers compared with Yellow-plumed Honeyeaters, but 2-3 seen on every walk through the scrub.
- White-eared Honeyeater *Lichenostomus leucotis*. Common, especially in thicker scrub on higher dunes in the central part of the park. Heard throughout the area on all visits.
- Purple-gaped Honeyeater *Lichenostomus cratitius*. Large numbers on 13/10/85 and 10/7/98 visits when large areas

- of eucalypts were flowering.
- Yellow-plumed Honeyeater *Lichenostomus ornatus*. Very common. Most common honeyeater in the park with large numbers throughout the scrub.
- Brown-headed Honeyeater *Melithreptus brevirostris*. 20–30 birds seen in a group moving through the area when eucalypts were flowering well.
- White-fronted Honeyeater *Phylidonyris albifrons*. Common. Heard or seen throughout park on all visits.
- Crimson Chat *Epthianura tricolor*. 4 birds seen on coastal samphire on 13/10/85. No breeding recorded within the park.
- Orange Chat *Epthianura aurifrons*. 4 birds seen on coastal samphire on 13/10/85. No breeding recorded within the park.
- White-fronted Chat *Epthianura albifrons*. Small numbers seen on all visits in samphire and nitre-bush.
- Jacky Winter *Microeca fascinans*. Very common. Seen on all visits in open areas of mallee.
- Red-capped Robin *Petroica goodenovii*. Small numbers seen on most visits before 1994, seen less frequently in recent years.
- Western Yellow Robin *Eopsaltria griseogularis*. Small numbers seen in association with dryland tea-tree *Melaleuca lanceolata*.
- Southern Scrub-robin *Drymodes brunneopygia*. 2–3 birds recorded on 13/10/85, 19/10/89 & 10/7/98.
- White-browed Babbler *Pomatostomus superciliosus*. Common. 5–6 groups of birds seen on all visits.
- Chestnut Quail-thrush *Cinlosoma castanotus*. A few pairs seen on all visits on sandy flats with a diversity of shrubs, e.g. tar bush *Eremophila glabra*, broom emubush and daisy-bush.
- Varied Sittella *Daphoenositta chrysoptera*. Two sightings of small groups on 19/10/88 and 19/10/89.
- Crested Bellbird *Oreoica gutturalis*. Common. Heard calling throughout on all visits.
- Gilbert's Whistler *Pachycephala inornata*. 1 bird seen on 13/10/85 & 10/7/98.
- Rufous Whistler *Pachycephala rufiventris*. 1 bird seen on 19/10/89 & 5/10/94.
- Grey Shrike-thrush *Colluricincla harmonica*. Common. Seen on all visits.
- Restless Flycatcher *Myiagra inquieta*. A few on most visits; many seen & 4 nests on 28/8/87.
- Grey Fantail *Rhipidura fuliginosa*. Small numbers in open areas.
- Willie Wagtail *Rhipidura leucophrys*. Small numbers in open areas. 2–3 birds seen on all visits.
- Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina novaehollandiae*. Common. Group of 5–6 birds seen on all visits.
- White-winged Triller *Lalage sueurii*. Seen on 13/10/89 and 5/10/94.
- Masked Woodswallow *Artamus personatus*. In mixed flocks with the next species on 13/10/85, 19/10/89 & 5/10/94.
- White-browed Woodswallow *Artamus superciliosus*. In mixed flocks with the previous species on 13/10/85, 19/10/89 & 5/10/94.
- Black-faced Woodswallow *Artamus cinereus*. Seen on all visits in small numbers in open areas on northern edge of park. More common in open saltbush to the north.
- Dusky Woodswallow *Artamus cyanopterus*. Groups of up to 20 birds on most visits.
- Grey Butcherbird *Cracticus torquatus*. Common. Seen on all visits.
- Australian Magpie *Gymnorhina tibicen*. 2–3 birds seen in open areas on all visits.
- Grey Currawong *Strepera versicolor*. Common throughout the park. Seen on all visits.
- Australian Raven *Corvus coronoides*. Ranged from 2–3 birds to large flocks.
- Singing Bushlark *Mirafra javanica*. 1 bird on 20/8/89.
- Richard's Pipit *Anthus novaeseelandiae*. Common along tracks and in open areas.
- *House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*. 1 bird on 13/10/85.
- Zebra Finch *Taeniopygia guttata*. A small flock on 13/10/85.
- Mistletoebird *Dicaeum hirundinaceum*. 1 bird in a mistletoe on a bullock bush *Alectryon oleifolius* on the northern boundary on 10/7/98.
- Welcome Swallow *Hirundo neoxena*. 5 birds at old tank at shed.
- Tree Martin *Hirundo nigricans*. 20–30 birds recorded on 13/10/85 & 5/10/94.
- Rufous Songlark *Cincloramphus mathewsi*. 3 birds recorded on 19/10/89.
- Brown Songlark *Cincloramphus cruralis*. 1 bird recorded on 13/10/85 & 20/8/89.
- Silvereye *Zosterops lateralis*. Uncommon. 3–4 birds seen on most visits.
- *Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*. 2–3 birds seen near coast on most visits.

CORRIGENDA

The following list of corrections applies to Vol. 32, Part 6, Supplement, 'List of English and scientific bird names, recommend for use in papers submitted to the *South Australian Ornithologist*' (inserted between pp. 102 and 103). The disk file kindly supplied to the editors was understood at the time to be a correct copy of the species list in 'The taxonomy and species of birds of Australia and its Territories'.

- p. i, col. 1, Anatidae, insert * after Swan, Mute.
- p. i, col. 2, Anatidae, insert * after Mallard.
- p. ii, col. 2, Threskiornithidae, for both Spoonbill, Royal and Yellow-billed change *Platēlea* to *Platalea*.
- p. iv, col. 1, Columbidae, insert * after Turtle-Dove, Laughing.
- p. iv, col. 1, Columbidae, insert * after Turtle-Dove, Spotted.
- p. vi, col. 1, Pardalotidae (cont.), delete ^E after Gerygone, Norfolk Island.
- p. vi, col. 1, Pardalotidae (cont.), insert ^E after Gerygone, Lord Howe.
- p. viii, col. 2, Zosteropidae (cont.), insert ^E after White-eye, Robust.

In Vol. 33, Part 7:

- p. 127, 'The birds of Munyaroo Conservation Park and adjoining coast', Abstract, line 8, 'Grey-shrike Thrush' should be 'Grey Shrike-thrush'.
- p. 139, 'First record of the Black-faced Monarch in South Australia', para. 2, line 10, replace 'Satin Flycatcher' with 'Rufous Fantail' (The next occurring 'Satin Flycatcher' on lines 10-11 is correct.). My apologies to John Eckert for the transcription error—Ed.