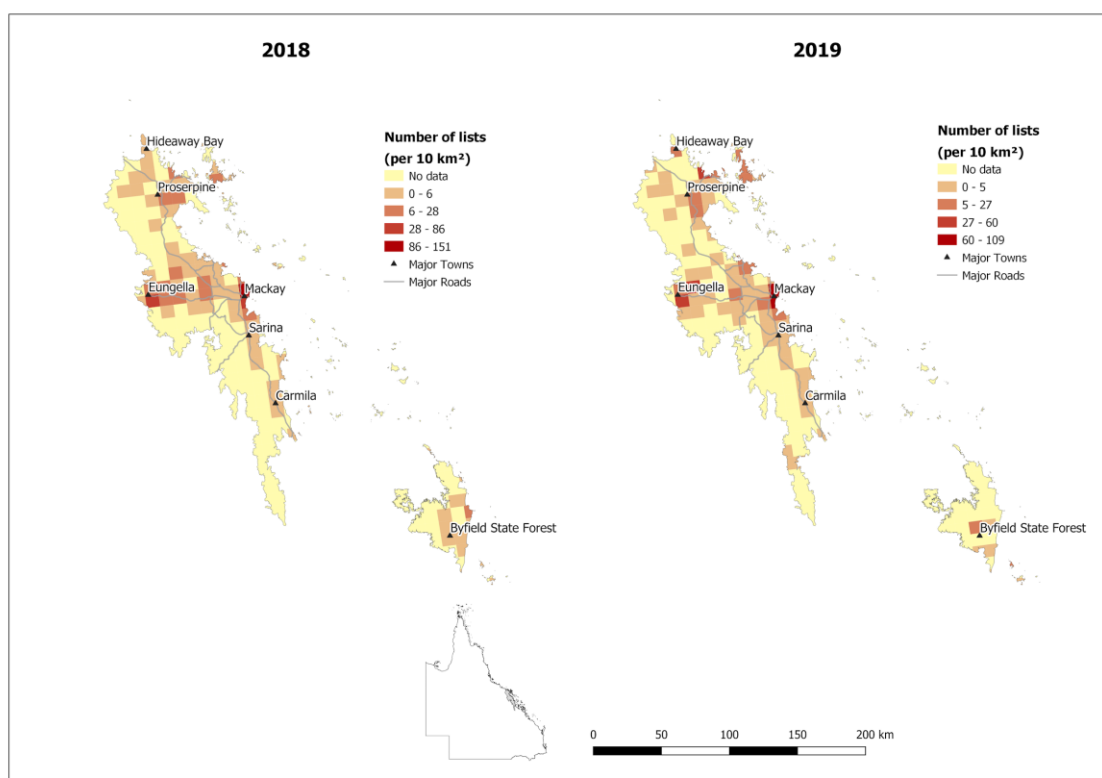


7. Central Queensland Coast

Bob Black and Allison Roberts



Map of CQC Bioregion showing eBird survey effort

Geography

The Central Queensland Coast Bioregion (CQC), covering merely 0.9% of the State (14,843 km²), is surrounded by the large, drier Brigalow Belt bioregion. CQC is divided into two discrete sections: the larger, northern portion which extends north of Proserpine to Clairview, and the smaller, southern portion between Shoalwater Bay and Yeppoon (DES 2013). The northern section is bordered to the west by the Clarke and Connors Ranges which receive a high rainfall and drain into the Proserpine River, Pioneer River, and other coastal streams. The southern section includes the Byfield or Coastal Range, which is drained by Waterpark Creek. The bioregion also includes many offshore islands, including the Whitsunday, Percy, and Keppel Groups. The major towns in the Bioregion are Proserpine, Mackay, Sarina and the northern part of Yeppoon (DES 2013).

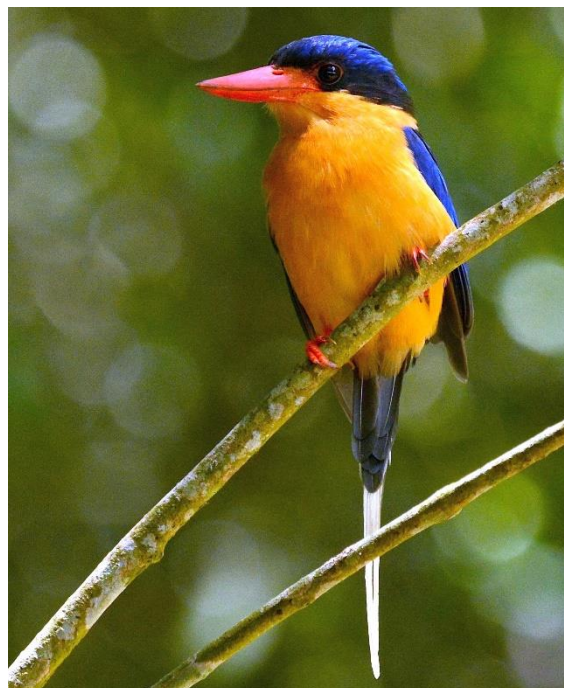
The Clarke Range supports large tracts of broad-leaved evergreen rainforest and tall eucalypt forest. The flora of these high-altitude rainforests has a close affinity with that of North Queensland's Wet Tropics but contains several endemic rainforest species. The Connors and Byfield Ranges also have substantial areas of broad-leaved evergreen rainforest, but these are simpler, showing the effect of species loss over the cold and dry Ice Age periods. These forests have been re-enriched with tree species carried by birds (mostly fruit-pigeons) mainly from the rainforests to the north. They are rich in species of *Lauraceae* and are sometimes called Pigeon Forests (Bill McDonald, personal communication). Savannah woodlands and semi-deciduous rainforests extend across lower and less fertile parts of the bioregion.

The climate is tropical, with a hot wet season and a warm dry season (BoM 2016). About 60% of the rain falls from January to March. This is the wettest part of Central Queensland with mean annual rainfall varying across the bioregion from 1,300 mm to 2,000 mm (BoM 2018). Large areas of the coastal lowlands

of CQC have been cleared for sugar cane and pasture, leaving only small remnant 'islands' of native vegetation.



Eungella Honeyeater (Barry Deacon)



Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher
(Peter Valentine)

Birds of the bioregion and their conservation

The Queensland Government lists 427 native and 12 introduced bird species in CQC from historic data, of which 28 are considered threatened or rare and may be locally extinct. The Red-whiskered Bulbul is a declared pest in Queensland but seems to have a limited distribution in the Mackay urban area (DES 2022). More recently in 2013 and 2014 surveys, Griffith University and Queensland Museum recorded 236 species in the Eungella region alone (Leach et al. 2020). The region includes important resting habitat for migratory shorebirds and the entire range for the endemic Eungella Honeyeater.

Larger National Parks (NP) in the bioregion include Conway, Whitsunday Islands, Eungella, Cape Palmerston, and Byfield. There are also several smaller National Parks including Bluff Hill, Cape Hillsborough, Mount O'Connell, and most of the smaller Whitsunday Islands. Many State Forests have been established for native timber or both native and exotic pine plantations. The southern area also includes part of the Shoalwater Bay Military Training Area which is closed to public access. There are also many smaller conservation parks and nature refuges in CQC (DES 2013).

The CQC has 1,097 km² of listed wetlands, including coastal and estuarine mangrove communities. Nationally important wetlands include Goorganga Plain, Sand Bay, Edgcumbe Bay, and Sarina/Ince Bays in the northern section. Broad Sound, Shoalwater Bay, Port Clinton and Corio Bay occur in the southern section (DES 2013). Three internationally significant shorebird sites occur in CQC: Pioneer River–Mcewens Beach for Lesser Sandplover, Great Knot and Far Eastern Curlew; Notch Point for Far Eastern Curlew; and Shoalwater Bay/Broad Sound for Bar-tailed Godwit, Whimbrel, Far Eastern Curlew, Great Knot, Terek Sandpiper, and Grey-tailed Tattler (Geering et al. 2007). The CQC bioregion encompasses four Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA): Clarke Range, Repulse Bay–Ince Bay, Shoalwater Bay, and parts of Broad Sound (BLA 2019).

Birdlife Mackay has an active group that does regular shorebird surveys which are reported to the Queensland Wader Study Group, and surveys at the Mackay Regional Botanical Gardens (BLA 2022). Since 2015 a research banding project led by the Queensland Bird Research and Banding Group has been visiting and monitoring birds at a site in Finch Hatton Gorge and in January 2019, five additional sites were added around Eungella NP and Dalrymple Heights with a focus on learning more about the movements and behaviour of the endemic and limited-range Eungella Honeyeater (Coleman et al. 2020).

Major events in 2018-2019

Mean maximum temperatures at Mackay were 0.8 to 2.1°C above average in the summer months in 2018 (BoM 2019), and 0.1 to 1.8°C above average in 2019 (BoM 2020). In late November and early December 2018, record high temperatures across much of Queensland with extremely low humidity led to a series of severe bushfires. A fire starting on the plains west of Mackay burnt up the Eungella Range and destroyed large areas of habitat, including areas of normally fire-resistant rainforest (Hines et al. 2020).

Proserpine in the north had roughly average rainfall in 2018 and 2019, but very low dry season rainfall in 2018 with only 46 mm between May and November compared to a mean of 290 mm. In 2019, May through November rainfall was still well below average at 125 mm. Further south, in Mackay, both 2018 and 2019 rainfalls were below average with 1,005 mm and 1300 mm respectively compared to a mean of 1,595. May to November rainfall was about half the average for the period. At Byfield in the south of the bioregion, 2018 rainfall was 1,366 mm and 2019 had record low rainfall of only 722 mm or about 40% of the long term mean of 1,670 mm (BoM 2019 and 2020).

A total of 282 bird species was recorded in the CQC Bioregion in 2018 and 271 in 2019.

2018 Notable bird records

Australasian Gannet. Observations included one recorded at Bogie in October and one at Byfield NP in July and August.

Australasian Shoveler. Only one observation of a single bird recorded at Mackay Goose Ponds in July, but this may be an under-reported species.

Australian Pratincole. One recorded at Marian in November.

Baillon's Crake. Single record of one bird at Beaconsfield in February.

Barn Owl. A single bird recorded on the Benholme–Mackay Eungella Road in November.

Bar-tailed Godwit. Near-threatened. Recorded at six sites in the Mackay and Whitsunday areas from September to April with a maximum count of 43 recorded at McCreadys Creek estuary in October. From the south of the bioregion 12 observed at Corio Bay in March.

Black Noddy. Eight observed off the coast of Port Clinton in November.

Black-naped Tern. 27 recorded at Langford Bird Reef in October.

Black-tailed Godwit. Observations included one at Bucasia boat ramp in February and five at McCreadys Creek in October.

Bridled Tern. Three recorded off the coast of Port Clinton in November.

Brown-backed Honeyeater. Seven recorded at Conway Beach “in the Melaleuca lined swamp behind the caravan park” being vocal and easily observed in July. This is the very southern limit of the species’ recorded range.

Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher. Up to three recorded at Kuttabul in January and February, and three recorded at Pioneer Parks NP in January.

Common Greenshank. Observations recorded at five sites around the Mackay area from October through February with a maximum count of nine at McCreadys Creek estuary in October.

Common Sandpiper. Observations of one or two birds recorded at four sites from October to February around the Mackay and Whitsunday regions.

Common Tern. 67 observed at McCreadys Creek estuary in October.

Curlew Sandpiper. Near-threatened. Two observed at Corio Bay in March.

Double-banded Plover. Species is an uncommon winter migrant with observations including two at Tedlands Boat Ramp at Koumala in May and one at Conway Beach in July.

Eastern Grass Owl. One recorded at Sandringham Reserve in July.

Eungella Honeyeater. Observations of small numbers recorded through the year in Eungella district with a maximum count of 13 at Broken River in December.

Eurasian Whimbrel. Species is a summer migrant with some over-wintering and recorded at many sites throughout the year with a maximum count of 120 at Illawonga Beach Resort in January.

Far Eastern Curlew. Endangered. Most observations recorded at various sites from October to April with a few in winter months. Maximum count of 75 observed at Illawonga Beach Resort in January.

Fuscous Honeyeater. Up to three recorded at Mt Ossa in January and April, and an unspecified number recorded at Byfield NP in August.

Great Knot. Endangered. Observations included two at Corio Bay in March and single birds at Illawonga Beach and McCreadys Creek in October. Small numbers occasionally remain through the winter.

Greater Sand Plover. Observations recorded at five sites from October to April with a maximum count of 25 at Illawonga Beach Resort in October.

Greater Sooty Owl. Three observations of one or two birds recorded at Eungella in July, and one at Crediton in September.

Green Pygmy Goose. Although uncommon in the bioregion, two observations of two and three birds recorded at Kinchant Dam in September and December.

Grey-tailed Tattler. Near-threatened. Recorded at many sites around the Mackay and Whitsunday regions from July to April with a high count of 85 at Shell Grit Creek in February.

Horsfield’s Bush Lark. One recorded at Teemburra Creek Dam in July, and six at McCreadys Creek estuary in September. This species may be under-reported in the bioregion.

Large-tailed Nightjar. Species considered a common breeding resident with eight records across the region including four observed at Sandringham Reserve in July.

Latham’s Snipe. Observations of one or two recorded at four sites from August through January.

Lesser Sand Plover. Observations recorded at five sites from October to February with a maximum count of 120 at Shell Grit Creek in Mackay during February.

Long-billed Corella. Introduced. Observation recorded at Great Keppel Island in July.

Maggie Goose. Large numbers recorded at small dams in the Yeppoon area (personal observation).

Marsh Sandpiper. Observations included unspecified number at Mcewens Beach Road in January and 10 at Illawonga Beach in November.

Orange-footed Scrubfowl. For the last six years one has been recorded at Byfield and appears to have re-established at the southern range limit (personal observation).

Pacific Golden Plover. Observations with a maximum count of 40 recorded at six sites from October to February within the Mackay Regional Council district.

Pacific Swift. Species is a summer migrant with observations recorded November to January. Maximum count of 1,186 at Freshwater Beach in November.

Pale-vented Bush-hen. Furtive species with 13 observations of one or two recorded at five sites from October to February. Observations recorded during breeding season when calls are distinctive.

Peregrine Falcon. One recorded at Shoalwater Bay in October.

Red-backed Buttonquail. One recorded at Eungella Village in December.

Red-kneed Dotterel. Six records through the year at various sites in the Mackay Regional Council district with a maximum of twenty observed at Bakers Creek Conservation Area in June. Numbers increase during dry conditions inland.

Red-necked Stint. Near-threatened. Four observations with a high count of 220 recorded at Illawonga Beach Resort in January, and one count of 80 recorded at Shell Grit Creek in February. Only recorded from October to February.

Red-tailed Tropicbird. Seven recorded off a cruise ship in the Whitsunday Islands in December.

Roseate Tern. One recorded at McCreadys Creek estuary in October, and two recorded off a cruise ship in the Whitsunday Islands in November.

Ruddy Turnstone. Observations recorded at five sites from October to February with a maximum count of 11 at McCreadys Creek estuary in October.

Rufous Owl. One recorded at the Whitsunday Passage in July.

Sanderling. One recorded at Bucasia boat ramp in February, and 11 recorded at Sandy Point in Byfield NP during December (personal observation).

Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. Only three observations recorded, all from the Mackay area with a high count of 47 at Lake Barfield in January. A common wetland bird in the region with moderate numbers over-wintering.

Sooty Tern. 236 recorded off the coast of Port Clinton, and 13 recorded at Bogie, both in November.

Spotless Crake. Single record of one bird at Sandringham Reserve in February.

Spotted Catbird. One observation recorded at Eungella NP in July, but this species is normally restricted to Wet Tropics so confirmation or field notes would be helpful to confirm.

Spotted Nightjar. Species considered a rare resident in the drier areas of the bioregion. A single observation recorded at Sandringham Reserve in July noted that observer needed to check calls so may not be a reliable record.

Square-tailed Kite. Observations included one at Conway State Forest in October and one at Villa Mar Colina in Yeppoon during January.

Squatter Pigeon. Three observations recorded: eight at Pinevale Road in November, one at Kinchant Dam in December, and three at Hideaway Bay in September.

Terek Sandpiper. Recorded at four sites in the Mackay region from October through April with a maximum count of 18 at McCrearys Creek estuary in November.

Torresian Imperial Pigeon. Species is a summer migrant with mostly small numbers recorded from September to March, but the JCU Pied Imperial Pigeon Count recorded 1,308 at Salonika Beach at the end of January, mostly traveling from the mainland to Victor Island.

White-browed Crake. Five observations of one or two birds recorded at various sites from October to February.

White-gaped Honeyeater. Observations included three at Cape Palmerston NP in August, one at Peter Faust Dam in August, and one at Eungella in December.

White-throated Needle-tail. Species is a summer migrant with observations recorded November to January. High counts included 120 recorded at Freshwater Beach and 100 in Mackay in November.

Wonga Pigeon. Only two observations recorded: Carmila Beach in May and Greenhill in July.

2019 Notable bird records

Australian Painted-snipe. Endangered. A single bird recorded at Lake Barfield in November.

Baillon's Crake. One or two recorded three times at the Mackay Botanical Gardens from October to December

Barred Cuckooshrike. Four recorded at Boulder Creek in October, and one at Finch Hatton Gorge in December.

Bar-tailed Godwit. Near-threatened. Observations recorded in low numbers at many sites from July to April with a high count of 388 on the Whitsunday Coast in October.

Black-chinned Honeyeater. One recorded at Seaforth in March.

Black-naped Tern. 10 recorded at Hardy Reef and one at Shute Harbour in December.

Black-necked Stork. Near-threatened. Five observations of one or two recorded throughout the year.

Black-tailed Godwit. Near-threatened. Up to eight recorded on the Whitsunday Coast over two days in October.

Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher. Ten recorded at Byfield from November to April (Personal Observation). This is the southern limit of the species' regular migration from New Guinea.

Common Greenshank. Observations recorded at seven sites from October to February with a maximum count of 29 at Mcewens Beach in October

Common Sandpiper. Six observations of single birds recorded at Sandfly Creek, Arlie Beach, and Koumala from September through December.

Common Starling. Introduced. Four records of four or five birds recorded by one observer at Paget from April to August.

Common Tern. 1,472 recorded at Paget in October, and two at Sandy Point on Corio Bay in December.

Curlew Sandpiper. Near-threatened. Observations included 43 at Corio Bay in April, one at Sandy Point in Byfield NP during December, one at Shell Grit Creek in August, and eight at Paget in August.

Double-banded Plover. Observations included 12 at Illawonga Beach in July, up to 10 at Shellgrit Creek in July and August, and one at Sandy Point in Byfield NP in late October which is an unusually late record for this winter migrant from New Zealand.

Eurasian Whimbrel. Observations recorded at many sites throughout the year with a high count of 194 at Paget in October.

Far Eastern Curlew. Endangered. Observations recorded throughout the year with a high count of only 60 at Sandy Point in Byfield NP during December.

Glossy Black Cockatoo. One recorded at Eungella Village in October which is near the species' northern limit, and eight recorded at Byfield SF in December.

Great Cormorant. An uncommon species for CQC, but one recorded at Andergrove in April.

Great Frigatebird. One recorded at McCreadys Creek estuary in March.

Great Knot. Endangered. Eight observations from August through April with a high count of 2,350 on the Whitsunday Coast in October.

Greater Sand Plover. Observations recorded at five locations from July through April with a maximum count of 400.

Greater Sooty Owl. At Eungella NP on a single night in May, one recorded at Broken River and one at Crediton Loop by one observer.

Grey Plover. Four records of up to 70 birds recorded at Paget and on the Whitsunday Coast over three days in October.

Grey-tailed Tattler. Observations recorded throughout the year with a high count of 175 at Paget in October.

Latham's Snipe. Recorded at six sites from August to November with a maximum count of eight.

Lesser Sand Plover. Observations recorded at four locations from August to December with a maximum count of 468.

Little Eagle. One recorded at Andergrove in May.

Little Grassbird. One recorded at Beaconsfield in June and one at Seaforth in September. Probably an under-reported species due to very furtive behavior and is mostly detected from calls.

Little Tern. Observations recorded at various sites in March, April, October, and December with a high count of 300 at Paget in October.

Magpie Goose. Max count of 4,200 at Nursery Dam, Farnborough, in March. (Personal Observation)

Marsh Sandpiper. Eight at Slade Point and one at Bluewater Trail in Mackay recorded during October.

Masked Booby. One recorded at Hardy Reef in December.

Metallic Starling. Four observations of up to 15 birds recorded at three locations for this summer migrant from November to January.

Oriental Cuckoo. One of these rare non-breeding summer migrants recorded at Paul Burger Road in December.

Pacific Golden Plover. 13 observations from August through April recorded with high counts including 62 at Byfield NP in December and 144 at Paget in October.

Pacific Swift. Summer migrant with only three observations of up to 15 birds recorded from November and December at Cape Hillsborough and Collaroy.

Pale-vented Bush-hen. Most observations throughout the year of one or two birds at Mackay Botanical Gardens, but also single birds recorded at Yakapari Seaforth Road in March and De Moleyns Lagoon in July.

Pallid Cuckoo. Only one observation at Gunyarra Road in October.

Peregrine Falcon. One recorded near Shute Harbour in October.

Plum-headed Finch. 21 recorded at Sandfly Creek in Mackay during June, and six recorded at Gargett in December.

Red Knot. Near-threatened. Three observations of up to 12 recorded over three days in October in the Mackay and Whitsunday region.

Red-kneed Dotterel. Five records of one or two birds through the year at various sites in the Mackay region. Numbers increase during dry conditions inland.

Red-necked Stint. Near-threatened. 14 observations from April through December around the region with a high count of 400 at Shell Grit Creek in October.

Ruddy Turnstone. Observations recorded at six sites throughout the year with a high count of 20 on the Whitsunday Coast in October.

Rufous Owl. One recorded at Finch Hatton in December.

Sanderling. 12 recorded at Sandy Point in Byfield NP during October, and six recorded in December.

Satin Flycatcher. One recorded at Sandringham Reserve in June and one at Airlie Beach in July. A rare species in Central Queensland. mostly recorded as a Spring or Autumn passage migrant.

Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. Recorded in small numbers at many sites from October to December and in July, with a high count of 81 at Mcewens Beach in October. Moderate numbers are known to over-winter. Only southern records include one recorded at Corio Bay, Byfield NP, in December and two in April. The small number of southern records for this common wetland bird reflects the lack of shorebird surveys in the southern CQC.

Spotless Crake. One recorded at Seaforth in September and Plantation Palms Wetland in November.

Striped Honeyeater. One recorded at Collaroy in November.

Terek Sandpiper. Seven observations at five locations recorded with one in April and December and five in October. Maximum count of 25 recorded at Slade Point in October.

Torresian Imperial Pigeon. Summer migrant recorded in small groups of up to 14 from August to March.

Wandering Tattler. One recorded at Airlie Beach in December.

White-browed Crane. Five observations of single birds recorded at Kerrisdale in Beaconsfield, Mackay Regional Botanic Gardens, and Plantation Palms Wetland Trail from May through November.

White-gaped Honeyeater. Up to five recorded at Calen in July, and two recorded at Bloomsbury in October.

White-throated Needletail. Summer migrant with seven observations recorded October to December with a maximum count of 20 at Up River Road in Crediton during October.

Wonga Pigeon. One recorded at Cape Palmerston in September, and two at Carmila Beach in December.

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