

Additions to the avifauna of Diamantina National Park, Queensland

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Abstract

The avifauna of Diamantina National Park, southwest Queensland, is reasonably well documented with 183 species reported to date. This report provides details of an additional 16 species that have been recorded since 2010, as well as recent records of 24 uncommon species.

Introduction

Ley *et al.* (2011) summarised the status and distribution of 183 species of birds recorded from 1994 to 2009 in Diamantina National Park, southwest Queensland. Here we up-date that document, mainly with sightings since 2010, but also including some historical records. The addition of 16 species brings the total number of species for the park to 199.

Methods

We extracted relevant bird sighting records from the following sources: (1) lists compiled by Birds Queensland members during visits to the National Park in August 2013, July 2014, August 2015 and September 2017, (2) Wildnet (2020), all of which were submitted by CM and Fiona Leverington while they were the resident QPWS rangers at the Park from 2013 to 2019; (3) eBird (2017); and a few miscellaneous sources. We excluded records that, based on our experience of the birds of the Park, we considered to be unlikely and/or lacked adequate documentation.

For consistency with Ley *et al.* (2011) coordinates of sightings were rounded to one minute of latitude and longitude. For nomenclature and the sequence of species we used BirdLife Australia's *Working List of Australian Birds* (BirdLife Australia 2019).

Annotated list

In the following list, new species for Diamantina National Park are marked with an asterisk. Wildnet records are designated 'W' and records from the Birds Queensland expeditions to the Park are designated 'BQ'.

Musk Duck *Biziura lobata*

Additional records, from Lake Constance (23°51'S, 141°0'E) on 2 May 2016, from Paraputcheri Waterhole (24°4'S, 140°56'E) on 27 June 2017 (W), and from Hunters Gorge (23°40'S, 141°6'E) on 22 September 2017 (BQ).

Black Swan *Cygnus atratus*

Additional records, from Paraputcheri Waterhole (24°3'S, 140°52'E) on 27 September 2017 (BQ), and in floodwater from the Diamantina River near the ranger base (23°45'S, 141°7'E) on 18 March 2018 (CM pers. obs.).

Channel-billed Cuckoo *Scythrops novaehollandiae*

Additional records, at the ranger base (23°45'S, 141°8'E) on 2 February 2015, and at the Gum Hole campground (23°40'S, 141°59'E) on 13 January 2017 (W).

***Buff-banded Rail** *Hypotaenidia philippensis*

Present at the old broken dam south of the ranger base (23°46'S, 141°8'E) on 14 January 2017 (W).

***Australian Spotted Crake** *Porzana fluminea*

Present at the ranger base (23°45'S, 141°8'E) on 1 February 2018 (W).

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

One additional record, at Lightning Creek (23°52'S, 141°11'E) on 18 January 2015 (W).

Red-necked Avocet *Recurvirostra novaehollandiae*

Additional records, at Lake Constance (23°51'S, 141°0'E) on 21 July 2013 and 2 August 2013, and at Dippa Dippa Waterhole (24°0'S, 141°1'E) on 18 October 2013 (W).

Red-capped Plover *Charadrius ruficapillus*

One additional record, at Paraputcheri Waterhole (24°4'S, 140°56'E) on 27 June 2017 (W).

Oriental Plover *Charadrius veredus*

A second record for the Park, one bird at the old broken dam south of the ranger base (23°46'S, 141°8'E) on 24 September 2017 (BQ).

Plains-wanderer *Pedionomus torquatus*

Locations of sightings since 1995 in Diamantina NP include (more detailed locations not available): in the vicinity of Eight Mile Creek on the Winton Road north of the ranger base, near Foothills Tank about 15 km northwest of the ranger base, near the Davenport Downs boundary south of the ranger base, and on the sand dune behind the ranger base; during long-standing and on-going surveys birds have been detected at many other sites in Diamantina NP, in Astrebla Downs NP, and in the Nails Creek corridor that separates them (Rich 2016).

***Australian Painted-snipe** *Rostratula australis* (Plate 1)

One bird present at the old broken dam south of the ranger base (23°46'S, 141°8'E) on 26 January 2014 (W).

***Black-tailed Godwit** *Limosa limosa*

Present at Lake Constance (23°51'S, 141°0'E) on 5 November 2019 (W).

Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *Calidris acuminata*

Additional records, at Cooridy Creek (23°56'S, 141°12'E) on 14 and 15 December 2013, 27 January 2014, and 26 January 2016, and at Cooryie Creek (23°47'S, 141°9'E) on 27 and 28 January 2017 (W).

Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis*

One additional record, one bird in the bore drain at the Mayne Pub Bore (23°32'S, 141°21'E) on 19 September 2017 (BQ).

***Latham's Snipe** *Gallinago hardwickii*

One bird in the channels of the Diamantina River below Janet's Leap lookout (23°41'S, 141°7'E) on 19 September 2017 (BQ).

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

Additional records, at Cooridy Creek (23°56'S, 141°12'E) on 15 December 2013 and 23 January 2016, and at Lightning Creek (23°52'S, 141°11'E) on 23 and 24 January 2016 (W).



Plate 1. Australian Painted-snipe male, Lake Samsonvale, SE Qld (Graham Donaldson)

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*

One additional record, at Goodappa Waterhole (24°1'S, 140°58'E) on 27 September 2017 (BQ)

Red-chested Button-quail *Turnix pyrrhotorax*

Additional records, from the Diamantina River near the ranger base (23°45'S, 141°7'E) on 17 March 2018 (W), and from 'Diamantina National Park' (no more specific locations given), eBird checklist S61319614 dated 10 November 2019 submitted by Nigel Jackett, and eBird checklists S32789745 and S32790720 dated 8 and 10 September 2016 respectively submitted by Peter Valentine and including a breeding record of a nest with eggs (eBird 2017).

Silver Gull *Larus novaehollandiae*

One additional record, at Eurathunda Waterhole (23°57'S, 140°55'E) on 5 November 2019 (W).

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*

Additional records, at Lake Constance (23°51'S, 141°0'E) on 11 November 2015, and at Paraputcheri Waterhole (24°4'S, 140°5'E) on 27 June 2017 (W).

***White-winged Black Tern** *Chlidonias leucopterus* (Plate 2)

One record, at Cooridy Creek (23°56'S, 141°12'E) on 27 January 2014 (W).

***Eastern Grass Owl** *Tyto longimembris*

One historical record, a probable and credible sighting by an experienced observer of one bird on the ground in open country near, but not at, Gum Hole campground (no more detailed location available) on 25 September 2003 (Chris Coleborn pers. comm. to Andrew Silcocks 27 December 2017). Eastern Grass Owls have been recorded previously in the vicinity of Diamantina NP, including at Elizabeth Springs Conservation Park to the northwest (Antos & Dann 2014) and at Astrebla Downs NP to the southwest (Stewart & Gynther 2003).

Plate 2. White-winged Black Tern, Cooridy Creek, Diamantina NP (Chris Mitchell)



Letter-winged Kite *Elanus scriptus*

Recorded at the ranger base (23°45'S, 141°8'E) on 1 August 2014, at the Diamantina River near the ranger base (23°45'S, 141°7'E) on 17 January 2015, and west of the ranger base towards the eastern boundary (23°42'S, 141°21'E) on 18 August 2018 (W). These birds lived in this vicinity for approximately 3 months

***Black-breasted Buzzard** *Hamirostra melanosternon*

One record, at Lightning Creek (23°52'S, 141°11'E) on 28 March 2018 (W). A surprising absentee from the previous Park list.

Swamp Harrier *Circus approximans*

Additional records, at the Diamantina River west of the ranger base (23°45'S, 141°7'E) on 8 May 2012, west of the ranger base towards the eastern boundary (23°44'S, 141°24'E) on 8 May 2012, and at the ranger base (23°45'S, 141°8'E) on 20 September 2019 (W).

***White-bellied Sea-Eagle**

Haliaeetus leucogaster Present at Hunters Gorge (23°40'S, 141°6'E) on 15 April 2014 and 16 April 2015, and at the Diamantina River crossing (23°42'S, 141°5'E) on 23 February 2016 (W).

***Oriental Dollarbird** *Eurystomus orientalis*

One bird at the Diamantina River crossing (23°42'S, 141°5'E) on 6 December 2017 (W).

Grey Falcon *Falco hypoleucos*

Active nests on the telecom tower beside the Winton Road on the Hamilton Range (23°41'S, 141°9'E) and at the Mayne Pub earth tank (23°32'S, 141°22'E) in September 2017 (BQ).

Night Parrot *Pezoporus occidentalis*

Since a dead juvenile bird was found beside an internal fence in 2006 (Cupitt & Cupitt 2008, McDougall *et al.* 2009) there have been several more records from the eastern section of the Park. Acoustic surveys since 2013 have detected birds at several sites, and the species is likely to be resident (Leseberg *et al.* 2019, Nick Leseberg pers. comm. to AL 9 August 2020). Population size is unknown, but likely very small and probably fewer than 10 pairs. Further surveys are required to identify roosting sites.

***Varied Lorikeet** *Psitteuteles versicolor*

A dead specimen was collected at Gum Hole campground (23°40'S, 140°59'E) on 18 July 2014 (BQ) and handed in to the Queensland Museum by Ian Gynther (Heather Janetzki pers. comm. to AL 19 August 2020).

Splendid Fairy-wren *Malurus splendens*

A third record for the Park, at Bummelberry Waterhole (23°58'S, 141°31'E) which is about 11 km east of Scotts Tank, on 12 June 2016 (W). Although common at Goneaway NP just to the east (AL pers. obs.), the species only just scrapes into Diamantina NP which is the extreme western limit of the known range in Queensland.

***Rufous-crowned Emu-wren** *Stipiturus ruficeps* (Plate 3)

Recorded in the east of the Park at two locations in the same grid block (23°46'S, 141°40'E) on 17 October 2019 by Nick Leseberg, Nigel Jackett, Bruce Greatwich and Patrick Webster (eBird 2017, N. Leseberg pers. comm. to AL 29 October 2019). This extends the known range of what is possibly a small and isolated population of this widespread species further to the southwest from Goneaway NP where it is common (AL pers. obs.).



Plate 3. Rufous-crowned Emu-wren at Lark Quarry, 110 km SW of Winton (Graham Donaldson)

Striped Honeyeater *Plectorhyncha lanceolata*

A second record for the Park, at Gum Hole campground (23°40'S, 140°59'E) on 26 September 2017 (BQ). At the very limit of its Queensland range here.

Painted Honeyeater *Grantiella picta* (Plate 4)

Additional records, on the western boundary of the Park (23°40'S, 140°50'E) on 9 August 2013, and at Gum Hole campground (23°40'S, 140°59'E) on 22 August 2013 and 25 July 2014 (BQ). All 11 of our records have been in the period July-September suggesting that the species may be a winter-spring visitor to the area as proposed by Higgins *et al.* (2001).

***Little Friarbird** *Philemon citreogularis*

Present at Gum Hole campground (23°40'S, 140°59'E) on 20 October 2013 (W).



Plate 4. Painted Honeyeater, Bowra, southwest Qld (Julie Sarna)

Grey-headed Honeyeater *Ptilotula keartlandi* (Plate 5)

Additional records, on the western boundary of the Park (23°40'S, 140°50'E) on 9 August 2013, and in the hard country of the Goyder Range (23°35'S, 141°4'E & 23°36'S, 141°3'E) where the birds were feeding in flowering Western Bloodwood *Corymbia terminalis* on 19 August 2013 (BQ).



Plate 5. Grey-headed Honeyeater, Alice Springs, NT (Jill Brown)

***Grey-crowned Babbler** *Pomatostomus temporalis*

Recorded at the ranger base (23°45'S, 141°8'E) on 5 December 2015 and 11 January 2017 (W).

***Olive-backed Oriole** *Oriolus sagittatus*

One historical record with photograph, from 'Diamantina National Park' (no more detailed location specified), eBird checklist S58723836, dated 29 May 2012, submitted by Rosemary Lloyd (eBird 2017). Although outside its accepted range here, it is present elsewhere in the Channel Country to the east and north of Diamantina NP (AL pers. obs.).

***Tawny Grassbird** *Cincloramphus timoriensis*

One record, at Gum Hole (23°40'S, 140°59'E) on 14 April 2013 of '8+ birds spaced out every 40-50 m along waterhole in large fringing beds of *Persicaria lapathifolia* Pale Knotweed' (Julian Reid 'Bird Sightings' birdsqueensland.org.au accessed 27 November 2020).

Little Grassbird *Poodytes gramineus*

One additional record, at Gum Hole campground (23°40'S, 140°59'E) on 22 August 2013 (BQ).

Discussion

It is probably true to say that no bird list is ever complete and it is not surprising that in the decade following the completion of data collection for the first publication on the birds of Diamantina National Park (Ley *et al.* 2011) a further 16 species have been added to the Park list.

Of the additional species, eight are within the potential range which they may occupy erratically or opportunistically, and whose occurrence at Diamantina NP is to be expected. These are the two Rallids, Australian Painted-snipe, Black-tailed Godwit, White-winged Black Tern, Eastern Grass Owl, White-bellied Sea-Eagle and Tawny Grassbird. Four species are beyond their accepted ranges, and may thus be considered vagrants: Varied Lorikeet, Grey-crowned Babbler, Little Friarbird and Olive-backed Oriole. Two migratory species, Latham's Snipe and Oriental Dollarbird, may be expanding their range, as numbers of reports of both seem to be increasing in the Channel Country. The Black-breasted Buzzard, on the other hand, is widespread across the north and inland of the continent, and the single record for Diamantina NP is the exception to what appears to be a gap in its distribution around the Channel Country. This suggests that there may be a gap in the distribution of the species around the Park. Only one species, the Rufous-crowned Emu-wren, is likely to have been present in the Park since our surveys began, yet remained undetected until 2019.

Additional species will undoubtedly be found in the Park in the future. Following the recent discovery of the Rufous-crowned Emu-wren in the Park an intriguing possibility as a future addition to the list is the Striated Grasswren *Amytornis striatus*. In central Queensland both species occur as small isolated populations of widespread species, are sympatric across much of their known ranges, and both are reasonably common in Goneaway NP (AL pers. obs.) which is only 35 km from the eastern boundary of Diamantina NP. The latter is the most remote and least surveyed part of Diamantina NP; it is also currently covered by a Prohibited Access order preventing public access to the eastern half of the Park.

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