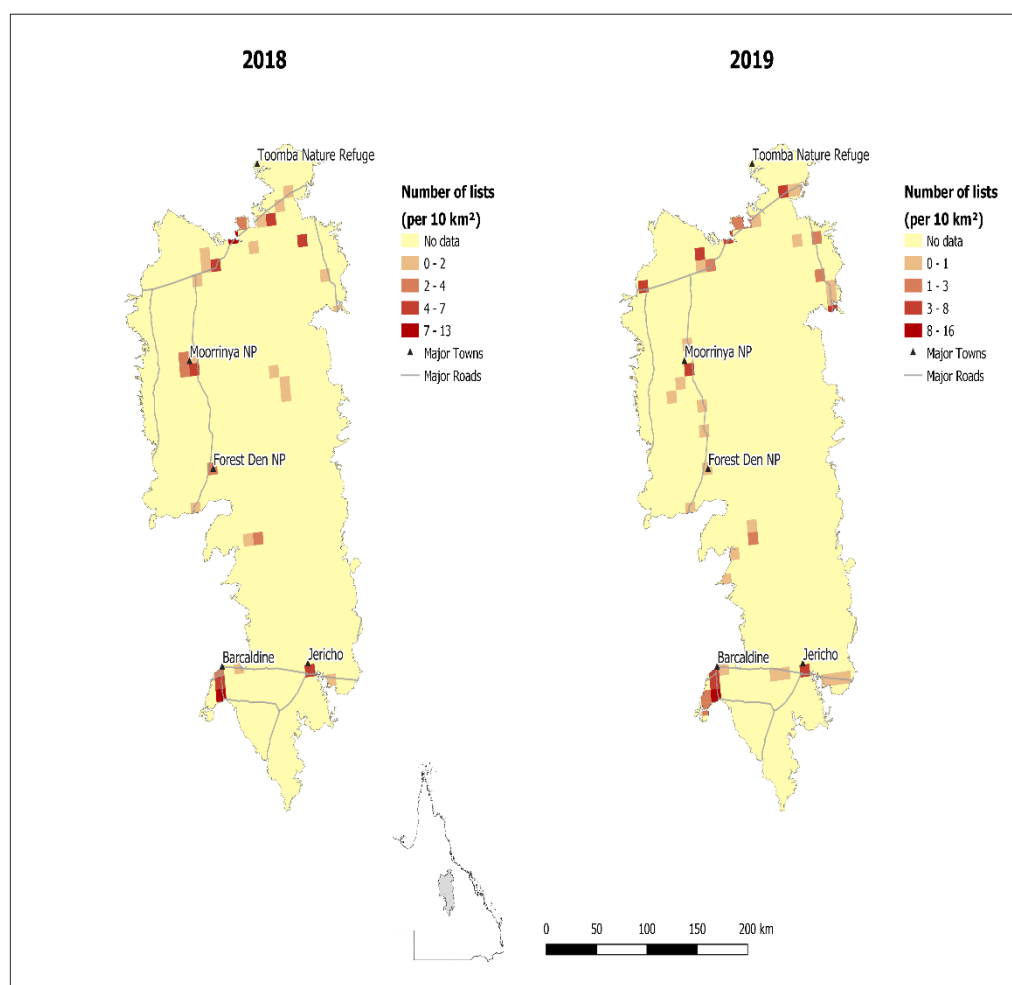


## 9. Desert Uplands

David Niland



Map of Desert Uplands Bioregion showing eBird survey effort

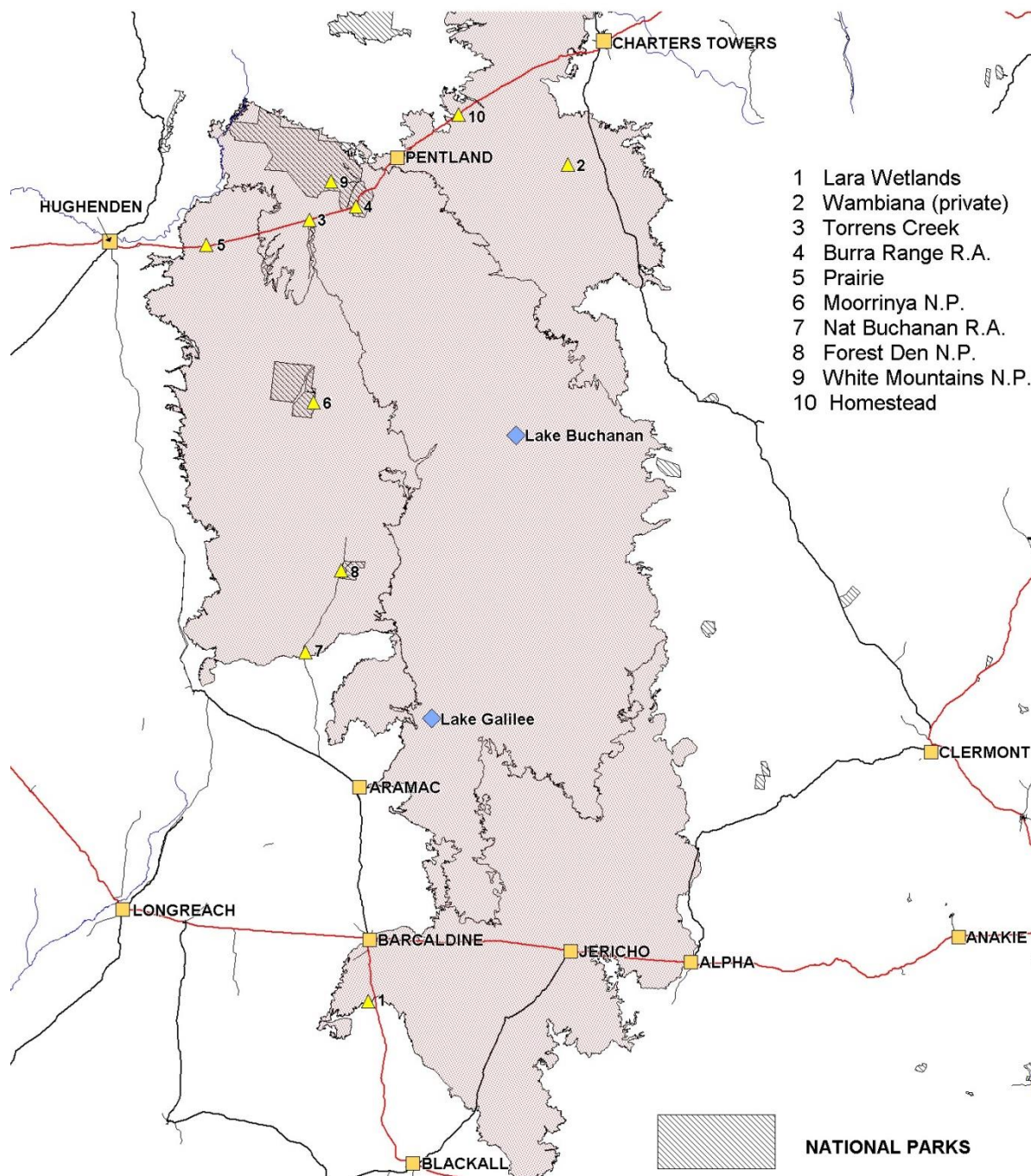
### Geography

The Desert Uplands Bioregion (DEU) covers 4.04% (69,410 km<sup>2</sup>) of the area of Queensland. The region stretches along the Great Dividing Range from Barcaldine and Alpha in the south to Pentland and Prairie in the north. It is mainly geologically comprised of sandstone ranges with associated sand plains to the west. There are two internal drainage basins (Buchanan and Galilee Lakes) and some catchments flowing to the east and west. The Belyando and Cape Rivers drain to the east into the Burdekin catchment, but all western watercourses drain into the Thomson River which continues to Cooper Creek.

The major towns in the bioregion are Alpha, Jericho and Barcaldine along the Capricorn Highway, and Pentland to Prairie on the Flinders Highway (Fig. 1). There are no north-south road connections, except for the road from Torrens Creek to Aramac. Most of the area is within Charters Towers and Barcaldine Regional Councils with a small portion of Flinders Regional Council in the north-west.

DEU falls in the Grasslands and Subtropical climate zones (BoM 2016). The weather of DEU is strongly seasonal, with a distinct wet season from December to March and a dry season from May to October. Mean annual rainfall is c.500 mm in the west and c.600 mm in the east. Mean maximum temperatures

range from 25° to 33°C in the dry season (winter) and mean minima from 11° to 25°C in the wet season (summer) (BoM 2019).



Map of Desert Uplands bioregion, showing main locations mentioned in the text.



**Zebra Finch** (Graham Donaldson)



**Inland Thornbill** (Ross Monks)



**Yellow-billed Spoonbill** (Vince Bugeja)

## **Birds of the bioregion and their conservation**

The Queensland Government lists 356 native and four introduced bird species in DEU from historic data. 14 species are listed as rare or threatened. Protected areas in DEU include five National Parks (NP) and eight private nature refuges including Bimblebox Nature Refuge (DES 2013). This refuge is protecting critical habitat for the white-rumped subspecies of the Black-throated Finch and southern subspecies of the Squatter Pigeon and is currently threatened by a proposed mine (Bimblebox 2022). National Parks partially or wholly in DEU include White Mountains, Moorrinya, Forest Den, Cudmore, and Great Basalt Wall (DES 2013). The semi-arid climate and poor soils dictate that the only land use is pastoralism. The major threats to natural habitats are the continued clearing of land for livestock grazing and mines, severe bushfires associated with the planting and spread of buffel grass, and the increase in salinity in some soil types.

The Centre for Ecosystem Science at University of NSW conducted aerial surveys in October of both years which found the general decline in wetlands and waterbird abundance had continued. However, there

was a slight increase in total abundance in 2019. Most of the wetlands across Queensland were dry in 2018 with Lake Dunn the exception. In 2019 there was shallow water in Lake Galilee with a moderate number of waterbirds present. There were no signs of breeding waterbirds in this bioregion.

### Major events in 2018-2019

The temperatures in 2018 were above the long-term averages in this bioregion during summer and later in spring, but autumn and winter were close to average. Rainfall was below to very much below the long-term average for all seasons in 2018. The temperatures in 2019 were close to or slightly above average. The rainfall was above average for all seasons except spring, when it was just below average. Tropical cyclones in the 2018–2019 summer had a significant effect on the rainfall averages for 2019. The bulk of the bioregion was drought declared until March 2018, and then partly drought declared in Charters Towers and Isaac Regional Council areas and fully drought declared in Barcaldine Regional Council area until December 2019.

There was an influx of flocking species noted at Moorrinya NP and waterbirds at Pentland in April 2018. Another influx of waterbirds at Pentland was observed in May 2019, and flocks of woodswallows and Budgerigars were present at Barcaldine in July 2019. Significant sightings for 2018 include an Australasian Shoveler at Lake Dunn located 60km north-east of Aramac, a Brush Cuckoo at Forest Den NP, and a small flock of Little Crow at Pentland. Significant sightings for 2019 include a pair of Mulga Parrots north of Blackall, Red-backed Fairywren at Prairie, Inland Thornbills at White Mountains NP, and a White-backed Swallow at Jericho. In 2018 eBird recorded 174 species through 1,811 observation records, and in 2019 eBird recorded 161 species through 1,461 observation records in DEU.

### 2018 Notable bird records

**Wandering Whistling Duck.** Fifteen counted at Wambiana Station on 18 April.

**Grey Teal.** Large numbers recorded at Pentland in April with up to 120 counted.

**Spotted Nightjar.** Two birds recorded at Wambiana Station on 18 April.

**Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo.** Single birds recorded at Moorrinya NP in April and White Mountains NP in July.

**Diamond Dove.** Birds plentiful at Moorrinya NP with 40 counted in April.

**Black-tailed Nativehen.** Birds plentiful at Lara Wetlands in April–June with over 60 counted.

**Little Buttonquail.** A few observed at Wambiana Station and Moorrinya NP in April and August.

**Pied Stilt.** Birds plentiful at Lake Dunn in August with over 80 birds counted.

**Red-necked Avocet.** Two birds observed about 5 km east of Homestead on 2 January.

**Sharp-tailed Sandpiper.** One count of 30 recorded at Pentland on 6 April.

**Marsh Sandpiper.** One bird observed at Pentland in early April.

**Silver Gull.** Three birds recorded at Lake Dunn in August.

**Gull-billed Tern.** Two birds recorded at Lake Dunn in August.

**Straw-necked Ibis.** Large gathering of 100 birds recorded at Pentland in April.

**Oriental Dollarbird.** One bird observed at Pentland in early April.

- Cockatiel.** One count of 120 birds recorded at Lara Wetlands in April.
- Galah.** Large numbers observed at Pentland in July with one count of 150 birds.
- Rainbow Lorikeet.** Exceptional count of 80 birds recorded at Pentland in July.
- Scaly-breasted Lorikeet.** Three birds observed at Wambiana Station on 11 July.
- Budgerigar.** Exceptional numbers recorded at Moorrinya NP in April with one count of 300.
- Great Bowerbird.** Sightings only recorded at Pentland and east along the Flinders Highway.
- Red-backed Fairywren.** All records near the Flinders Highway.
- Brown Honeyeater.** Birds very commonly observed at Burra Range with one count of 60 in June.
- Banded Honeyeater.** One count of six birds recorded at Burra Range in June
- White-eared Honeyeater.** Birds also noted at Burra Range with five on 6 April.
- Grey-fronted Honeyeater.** Two birds observed at Moorrinya NP on 8 April.
- Red-browed Pardalote.** Single birds recorded at Barcaldine in July and Lake Dunn in August.
- Western Gerygone.** Species recorded at Lara Wetlands in June.
- Chestnut-rumped Thornbill.** One record of four birds at Lara Wetlands on 22 June.
- Masked Woodswallow.** About 100 birds observed at Moorrinya NP on 9 April.
- White-browed Woodswallow.** A big flight of 300 birds recorded at Moorrinya NP on 9 April.
- Little Crow.** One record of twelve birds at Pentland on 27 June which would be near the limit of its range.
- Brown Songlark.** Single birds recorded at Lara Wetlands and Moorrinya NP in April.
- Plum-headed Finch.** A count of 60 birds at Pentland recorded in July, a bit higher than usual.
- Latham's Snipe.** One observed at Pentland on 6 April.
- Inland Thornbill.** Two birds observed at Moorrinya NP on 10 April.
- Brush Cuckoo.** One bird observed at Forest Den NP on 17 April.
- Red-chested Buttonquail.** Two observed at Moorrinya NP on 11 May.
- Australasian Shoveler.** Seven birds observed at Lake Dunn on 8 August.
- Dusky Woodswallow.** Two birds recorded at Lake Dunn on 26 August.
- Square-tailed Kite.** Pair noted in Barcaldine on 29 October.
- Little Corella.** Two birds observed in Barcaldine on 29 October.

## 2019 Notable bird records

**Australasian Grebe.** Unusually high count of 69 birds recorded at Pentland in early May.

**Banded Lapwing.** Five birds observed at Moorrinya NP on 4 June.

**Black-fronted Dotterel.** Exceptional count of thirty birds recorded at Pentland in May.

**Brown Songlark.** One bird recorded at Pentland on 9 June.

**Budgerigar.** Large numbers recorded around Barcaldine in May through July with an estimate of 500 at Lara Wetlands on 25 May.

**Buff-banded Rail.** One observed at Lake Dunn on 25 August.

**Caspian Tern.** 13 birds counted at Lake Dunn on 24 June.

**Cockatiel.** Birds abundant and breeding at Lara Wetlands in April through August.

**Eastern Barn Owl.** One heard at Moorrinya NP on 3 June.

**Eastern Cattle Egret.** Record of observation at a dam 50 km south of Charters Towers on 2 August.

**Grey-headed Honeyeater.** One recorded near Uanda, north of Muttaborra, on 4 June.

**Hooded Robin.** Single birds observed around the Barcaldine area in May and July.

**House Sparrow.** Introduced. Populations established at Pentland, Prairie, Barcaldine, and Jericho.

**Inland Thornbill.** Two birds observed at White Mountains NP in early May, near limit of species range.

**Little Egret.** Three observed at Campaspe River crossing on Flinders Highway on 3 January.

**Maned Duck.** Unusually large gathering of 80 recorded at Pentland in July.

**Marsh Sandpiper.** One bird observed at Pentland in early May.

**Masked Woodswallow.** Large gathering of at least 250 birds recorded about 25 km south of Barcaldine on 5 July.

**Mulga Parrot.** Two birds observed along highway between Barcaldine and Blackall on 18 April.

**Rainbow Lorikeet.** At least 40 observed at the Campaspe River Crossing, Flinders Highway on 11 June.

**Red-backed Fairywren.** One recorded at Prairie on 3 January near western limit of range.

**Red-browed Pardalote.** One observed at Barcaldine on 27 December.

**Spotted Nightjar.** One bird observed near Moorrinya NP on 27 October.

**White-backed Swallow.** One bird recorded at Jericho on 18 May.

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