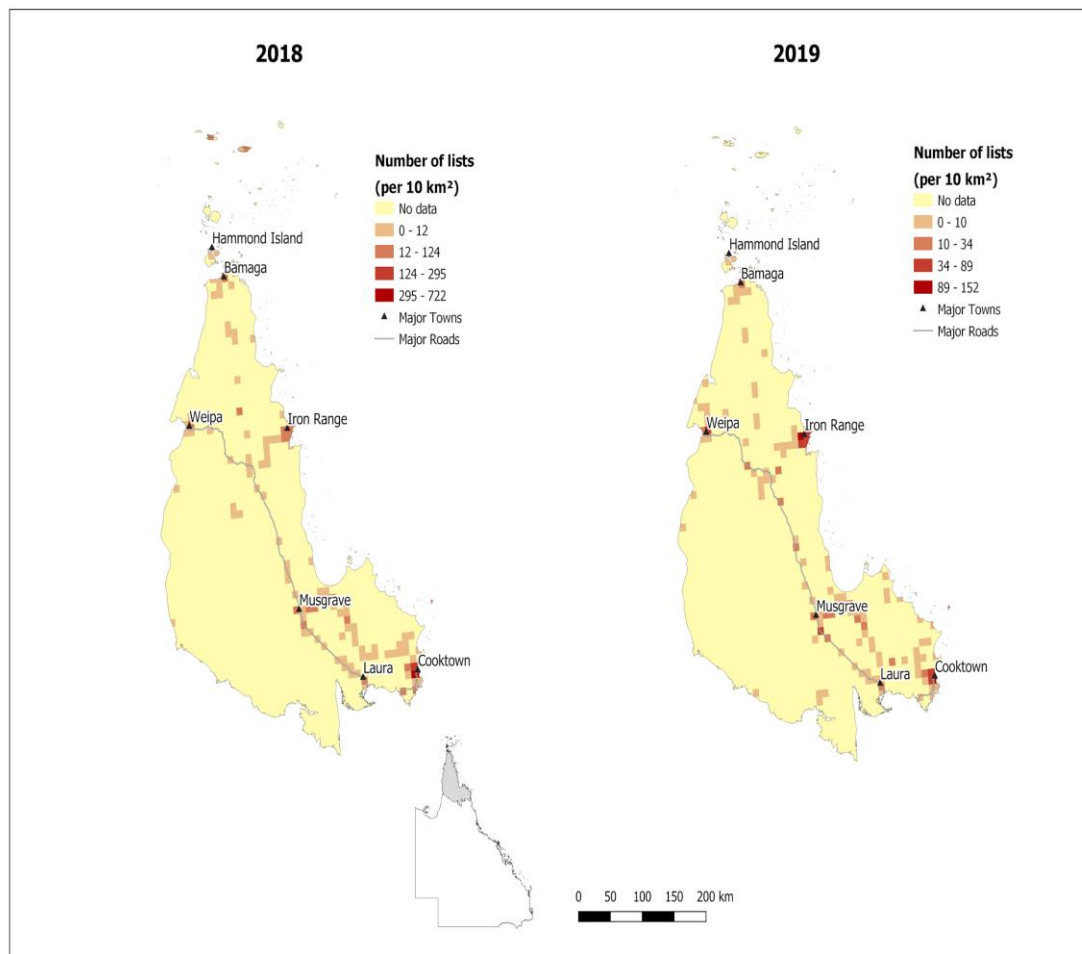


1. Cape York

Kath Shurcliff



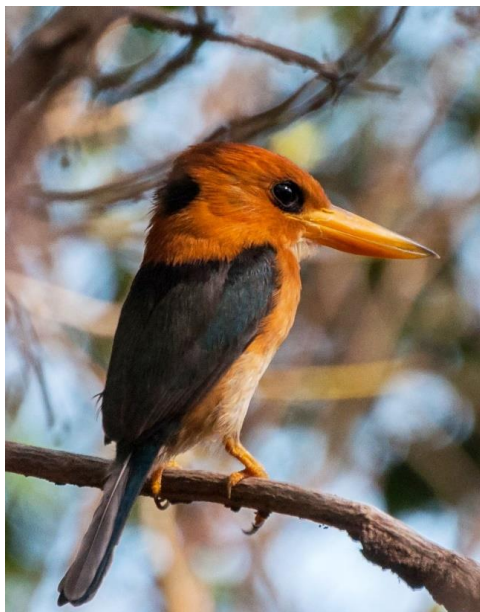
Map of Cape York Bioregion showing eBird survey effort



Palm Cockatoo (Micha Jackson)



White-faced Robin (Jon Coleman)



Yellow-billed Kingfisher (Judy Leitch)

Geography

The Cape York Peninsula Bioregion (CYP) is the seventh largest bioregion in Queensland, covering 121,100 km² (7.1%) of the State. There are ranges surrounded by foothills and broad, flat alluvial plains with extensive areas of eucalypt and melaleuca savanna woodlands dominated by Darwin stringybark, heathlands, grassland plains, wetlands, and lagoons (AWE 2008). The larger rivers include Endeavour, Norman, Kennedy, Edward, Holroyd, Coen, Archer, Pascoe, Wenlock, and Jardine. There are several areas along the east coast with tropical rainforest: Lockerbie Scrub, Kutini-Payamu (Iron Range), KULLA (McIlwraith Range), and small areas around Mt Cook and Mt Webb in the southeast. The latter two are separated from the northern rainforests by the large area of savanna grasslands in Rinyirru (Lakefield) National Park (NP). Most of the Cape has a tropical climate classification where Weipa and the tip are considered equatorial (BoM 2016).

Approximately 40% of the land is used for grazing. The main settlements of the peninsula are, from south to north: Cooktown, Laura, Coen, Lockhart River, Pormpuraaw, Aurukun, Weipa, Bamaga, Seisia. Road access throughout most of Cape York is limited, and severely hampered during the monsoonal wet season. However, an increasing number of birding tours is being organised during the Wet, with fly-in access to both Bamaga and Lockhart River, and vehicle hire available on the ground.

Birds of the bioregion and their conservation

CYP is the home to five endemic species including Buff-breasted Buttonquail, Golden-shouldered Parrot, Lovely Fairy-wren, White-streaked Honeyeater, and Yellow-spotted Honeyeater (BLI 2022a) and 18 other Australian range restricted species including Palm Cockatoo, Red-cheeked Parrot, Red-bellied Pitta, White-streaked Honeyeater, and Tawny-breasted Honeyeater. The Queensland Government lists 481 native species and eight introduced species from historic data, and 27 species are listed as rare or threatened in CYP (DES 2013).

BirdLife International has identified five Important Bird Areas (IBA) in CYP. The Lockerbie Scrub on the northern tip is a critical funnel point for migratory species from Papua New Guinea including Spangled Drongo and Rainbow Bee-eater as well as a good habitat for other range-restricted species (BLI 2022b). Iron and McIlwraith Ranges IBA is one of the only known habitats for the Buff-breasted Buttonquail and

is significant for many of the other Australia range-restricted species (BLI 2022c). Morehead River IBA which includes Artemis Station and Staaten River IBA is identified as critical for Golden-shouldered Parrots, possibly being habitat for Buff-breasted Button-quail, and other range-restricted bird species (BLI 2022de). Pormpuraaw IBA supports populations of a variety of other range-restricted species (BLI 2022f).

Since 1990 bush birds have been monitored and surveyed at Kutini-Payamu NP using standard capturing, measuring, and banding techniques. After a six-year absence, the team returned in November 2018 to continue the study. A Rufous Shrike-thrush originally banded in 1990 was recaptured which significantly extends previous survival data for the species. Overall, the populations of common bush species appear to be stable across the study area, but ongoing monitoring is recommended when considering climate change. This study site was dramatically impacted four months later by Cyclone Trevor.

Efforts to manage the habitat of the endangered Golden-shouldered Parrot have increased through a partnership between the Olkola rangers and Bush Heritage (BHA 2022). Even more efforts are being made at Artemis Station through the recently formed Artemis Nature Fund (ANF 2022). Research on the Buff-breasted Buttonquail, which has not reliably been recorded on Cape York for years, is being undertaken by The University of Queensland. Additional information on other species of buttonquails on Cape York is also being collected in this research.

Unfortunately, there is now an established population of Common Myna at Cooktown, but efforts are being made by local community groups to capture and remove the birds.

Major events in 2018-2019

There was increased birding effort from 2018 to 2019, with wet season records now including Kutini-Payamu NP and Bamaga areas. Wet season storms, including monsoon lows, bring strong winds with several records of large numbers of terns blown to coastal areas. However, there are still limited observations made throughout the year, except at a few towns such as Cooktown and Weipa. Inconsistency in records between years among uncommon species indicates how poorly the area is covered by birders. There continue to be only a few well visited locations: Rinyirru NP, Kutini-Payamu NP, and Bamaga area. These limited observations make it difficult to establish a baseline of “normal” numbers to assess “unusual” years, especially for wetland and grassland species. There are still unknown populations of restricted species to be discovered, as evidenced by Magnificent Riflebirds being found nearly 200 km southeast of previously recorded locations. Current research into buttonquails on Cape York should provide interesting discoveries about their populations and distributions in this region.

In March 2019 tropical Cyclone Trevor ripped through Lockhart River and Kutini-Payamu NP. There was extensive flooding and tree canopy damage including known nesting trees for several parrot species. It is unknown what the long-term impacts on these and other rainforest species may be, and increased birding and especially systematic monitoring efforts should be made in this area.

An innovative exploration into the Cape Melville NP rainforest plateau, accessed via helicopter, discovered a previously unknown population of Magnificent Riflebird. Two species of white-eye (Ashy-bellied and Canary) were found on the small islands off Seisia during the same visits, indicating these two species co-exist. There were no records of either Gouldian Finch or Buff-breasted Buttonquail in either 2018 or 2019.

EBird recorded 316 species from 38,881 records in 2018 and 321 species from 24,766 records in 2019 for CYP including the Torres Straits Islands. The following list highlights selected bird species and occurrences of interest for 2018 and 2019 from eBird.

2018 Notable bird records

Apostlebird. One observation recorded at Artemis station in central Cape York.

Ashy-bellied White-eye. Observations recorded at Little Woody Island, Little Tuesday Island, and Lizard Island

Australasian Shoveler. One unconfirmed observation recorded at Lake Patricia, Weipa in November.

Australasian Swamphen. Sightings only recorded at Kutini-Payamu NP and the Cooktown area.

Australian Bustard. Most observations recorded in southern Cape York near Rinyirru NP and Cooktown area.

Australian Masked Owl. One observation recorded of the distinctive subspecies *kimberli* in Kutini-Payamu NP in October.

Australian Pied Cormorant. Species observed in only a few permanent lakes at Weipa and Rinyirru NP.

Australian Reed Warbler. Most observations recorded in the Cooktown area in March through April, and one observation recorded at Weipa in November.

Barred Cuckooshrike. Only one observation recorded only at Kutini-Payamu NP in August.

Black Falcon. One recorded at Rinyirru NP in November.

Black Noddy. Observations recorded of single birds in Cooktown during periods of strong winds. 300 observed on an island off Lizard Island, and 100 observed at a known breeding location off the northern tip of Cape York.

Black-naped Tern. A few observations recorded on islands off both the east and west coasts of Cape York.

Black-tailed Godwit. Near-threatened. One observation of 100 birds recorded near Weipa.

Black-winged Monarch. Most observations recorded in Kutini-Payamu NP and Cooktown area where they are known to breed from October through April. Records in Rinyirru NP may be from migration.

Broad-billed Sandpiper. One observation recorded at Elim Beach, north of Cooktown.

Brown Cuckoo-dove. Most records restricted to rainforest habitats in northern Cape York. There were two records in southern Cape York.

Brown Noddy. A large number (102) observed on an island off Lizard Island.

Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher. One unconfirmed call without visual observation recorded in August which is significantly outside normal migratory residence from November through April.

Canary White-eye. Observations recorded only at Little Woody Island.

Cockatiel. One observation recorded only in Rinyirru NP.

Common Myna. Introduced. Small group is established in the Cooktown area.

- Crimson Finch.** A few observations of the white-bellied form recorded at Rinyirru NP and Kowanyama.
- Curlew Sandpiper.** Near-threatened. One observation recorded at Elim Beach, north of Cooktown.
- Diamond Dove.** Most records were in Rinyirru NP area, but there was one record near Weipa.
- Dusky Moorhen.** A few observations recorded at Umagico, Rinyirru NP, and the Cooktown area.
- Eastern Cattle Egret.** Records indicate the species is widespread throughout Cape York.
- Eastern Grass Owl.** One observation recorded of four birds at Rinyirru NP in July.
- Eurasian Coot.** Only sightings recorded at Rinyirru NP, Umagico, and Bamaga.
- Eurasian Tree Sparrow.** Introduced. There is an established population on Thursday Island, and one observation recorded at Portland Roads.
- Golden-shouldered Parrot.** Endangered. All observations recorded within the Artemis/Musgrave area.
- Great Cormorant.** Species only observed in the same permanent lakes as the Australian Pied Cormorant at Weipa and Rinyirru NP.
- Great Knot.** Endangered. A few observations recorded at the tip of Cape York and Weipa area.
- Great-billed Heron.** Only two observations recorded inland in Rinyirru NP and one observation at Weipa.
- Helmeted Guineafowl.** Introduced. Only one observation recorded from a rural residential area near Cooktown. This is inconclusive as to whether the species has established a breeding feral population in the area.
- Horsfield's Bush Lark.** In April and May three observations recorded in Rinyirru NP and two in Cooktown.
- House Sparrow.** Introduced. Only one observation recorded outside the known, established town populations in Lakeland, Cooktown and Thursday/Horn Islands.
- Jacky Winter.** Only recorded in Rinyirru NP.
- King Quail.** One observation recorded from Cooktown in December.
- Latham's Snipe.** Observations recorded along the eastern coast in August through November and again in March during passage migration.
- Little Curlew.** Only two observations recorded from northern Cape York in November.
- Little Eagle.** This is a rare raptor for Cape York with only three observations recorded for the year.
- Mangrove Gerygone.** Only one observation recorded on Horn Island.
- Mangrove Golden Whistler.** Observations limited to two small islands off tip of Cape York.
- Mangrove Robin.** All observations recorded on small island off Seisia, Little Woody Island, and Weipa.
- Masked Woodswallow.** One observation recorded in Rinyirru NP in September.

Northern Scrub Robin. Observations recorded at both Kutini-Payamu NP and Bamaga area throughout year.

Oriental Plover. One observation recorded at Lockhart River airport in October.

Red Goshawk. Near-threatened. Only observation recorded from the known nesting site in Rinyirru NP, but observations are under-reported due to conservation status.

Red-chested Buttonquail. Two observations including one with photo recorded at Rinyirru NP in August and November.

Red-necked Crake. Sightings only recorded in the Cooktown area, Bamaga area, and Kutini-Payamu NP.

Ruddy Turnstone. One observation recorded on an offshore island near Lizard Island.

Rufous Owl. Only three observations recorded. All were in in rainforest habitats dispersed throughout Cape York.

Rufous Songlark. Two observations recorded in Rinyirru NP in June and August.

Sanderling. One observation of 19 birds, including a flagged bird from Malaysia recorded on the northern Cape York tip in May.

Sarus Crane. Most observations recorded in Rinyirru NP from July through November with a maximum of 24 birds seen at one time.

Satin Flycatcher. Only one observation recorded at Cooktown in November on migration.

Scaly-breasted Lorikeet. Two observations recorded in northern CY: Moreton Telegraph Station and Kutini-Payamu NP.

Scaly-breasted Munia. Introduced. Only one observation recorded from the Cooktown area.

Shining Bronze Cuckoo. A few observations, mostly from the Cooktown area, recorded from August through to February.

Sooty Tern. Observation recorded in Cooktown coinciding with strong winds in late December.

Southern Cassowary. One observation recorded of this rarely observed species at Kutini-Payamu NP.

Spotted Dove. Introduced. Observations limited to the Cooktown environs where there is an established population.

Spotted Nightjar. One recorded in Rinyirru NP in August.

Square-tailed Kite. Most observations recorded in Cooktown area during dry season from May through August.

Star Finch. All observations recorded in the Rinyirru NP area.

Superb Fruit Dove. Records restricted to rainforest and closed forest habitats throughout Cape York. One unconfirmed observation with no details to confirm identification recorded for Rinyirru NP.

Swinhoe's Snipe. Multiple observations of one bird with identification confirmed by photographs recorded at Cooktown over several days in early December.

Tawny Grassbird. One observation recorded in Rinyirru NP in May

Topknot Pigeon. A few observations recorded in the Cooktown area in March and August. One sighting recorded at Bamaga in December.

Wandering Tattler. Two observations recorded in the Cooktown area.

Whiskered Tern. Observations recorded at Rinyirru NP and Weipa.

White-gaped Honeyeater. A few scattered observations recorded throughout Cape York including one unusual record for Cooktown.

White-throated Nightjar. A few observations scattered throughout Cape York recorded in September and October.

Willie Wagtail. Only one observation recorded north of Rinyirru NP at Weipa.

Wood Sandpiper. A few observations recorded on northern tip of Cape York.

Yellow-throated Miner. One undocumented observation recorded in Rinyirru NP. May have possibly been a misidentified Noisy Miner, but they are also an uncommon species in that area.

Zitting Cisticola. One observation recorded in Rinyirru NP in October.

2019 Notable bird records

Ashy-bellied White-eye. Six observations recorded on islands off Seisia, and one observation recorded on small island off Lizard Island in January and December.

Australasian Swamphen. Three observations recorded on Thursday Island in January, and two at Rinyirru NP in September and November.

Australian Bustard. Most observations recorded in southern area, but a few sightings further north.

Australian Pied Cormorant. Four observations recorded scattered around Cape York.

Black Noddy. Large numbers of around 200 observed on an island off Lizard Island in January.

Black Swan. One observation recorded at Rinyirru NP in November.

Black-tailed Godwit. Near-threatened. Three large groups of 50 to 100 observed around the Weipa area in October.

Broad-billed Flycatcher. Only two observations recorded: in Rinyirru NP in October and at Portland Roads in January.

Brown Songlark. A rarely recorded species on Cape York with one observation recorded in Rinyirru NP.

Brown Treecreeper. Although no records in 2018, in 2019 three observations were recorded near Weipa and one in Rinyirru NP.

Buff-banded Rail. One recorded on Thursday Island.

Canary White-eye. Observations recorded at Great and Little Woody Island in January and December.

Common Myna. Introduced. All records were from around Cooktown where a small population has established.

Crested Pigeon. One observation recorded on Morehead River in July.

Crimson Finch. Only recorded in Rinyirru NP.

Curlew Sandpiper. Near-threatened. One recorded in Weipa in October, and five birds observed in Kutini-Payamu NP in September.

Diamond Dove. Most observations recorded in Rinyirru NP area with two records near Weipa.

Eastern Cattle Egret. A large flock of 150 birds was observed north of Cooktown which indicates how well established this species has become, especially in southern Cape York.

Eastern Grass Owl. Two observations recorded with up to four birds at Rinyirru NP in July and November.

Eurasian Coot. Only three observations recorded at Rinyirru NP in November and December.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow. Introduced. Records limited to Thursday and Horn Islands.

Fan-tailed Cuckoo. Usually only found on Cape York from June through September. A few records scattered in Cape York with one unusual record in Cooktown area in December.

Golden-shouldered Parrot. Endangered. All observations recorded within Artemis/Musgrave area.

Great Cormorant. One observation recorded in Weipa.

Great Knot. Endangered. A single bird was observed around the Cooktown area in November, and four observed in Weipa in October.

Great-billed Heron. Three observations recorded in Weipa, Rinyirru NP, and Cooktown.

Helmeted Guineafowl. Introduced. Two observations recorded in Laura.

Hoary-headed Grebe. One recorded at Lockhart River in August.

Horsfield's Bush Lark. Five observations recorded in Rinyirru NP from September through December.

House Sparrow. Introduced. Observations recorded at Lakeland, Cooktown, Lockhart River, and Thursday and Horn Islands.

Jacky Winter. Three observations recorded only in Rinyirru NP.

Latham's Snipe. Recorded during the months of August through November, and again in March during migration.

Little Curlew. One bird observed at Lockhart River airstrip in October.

Little Eagle. Two observations recorded October and November in Rinyirru NP.

Magnificent Riflebird. Two reliable and experienced birders observed a male and female approximately 200 km southeast of known range which is a significant range extension for this species.

Maned Duck. Two observations recorded around the Cooktown area in June and November.

Mangrove Gerygone. Only one record in Weipa of this uncommonly recorded species.

Mangrove Golden Whistler. All records on the small islands off Seisia, and all made within a few days of each other

Mangrove Robin. Two observations recorded at Portland Roads, and observations at the usual location on islands off Seisia.

Masked Woodswallow. Two records in Artemis and Rinyirru NP in June and September.

Noisy Miner. Only two observations recorded from Laura and Rinyirru NP.

Oriental Pratincole. Four birds were observed on Lizard Island in January, and three observed near Cape Melville NP in December.

Pallid Cuckoo. One unusual observation recorded at Kutini-Payamu NP in January.

Paperbark Flycatcher. One observation recorded in Aurukun.

Pink-eared Duck. A single bird was observed around the Weipa area in January.

Red Goshawk. Near-threatened. Observations recorded near Rinyirru NP, northern Cape York, and the Cooktown area.

Red-backed Buttonquail. One recorded in Rinyirru NP in July and one in Cooktown area in November.

Red-cheeked Parrot. Records included and observation of three birds in Coen area where they are now rarely seen.

Red-chested Buttonquail. Few observations recorded in Rinyirru NP and Coen area from July through December.

Red-necked Avocet. One observation of six recorded at Weipa in September.

Red-necked Crake. Only six observations recorded. All observations in Cooktown area with none in rainforest habitats in northern Cape York in 2019.

Rock Dove. Introduced. One recorded in Cooktown where this species does not have established breeding population.

Roseate Tern. One observation recorded from Lizard Island in January, and one recorded near Kutini-Payamu NP at Chilli Beach in November.

Ruddy Turnstone. Several observations of single birds recorded around the Lockhart River area in September and November, and one recorded at the northern tip of Cape York in February.

Rufous Owl. One observation recorded in Weipa, and one recorded in Kutini-Payamu NP.

Sarus Crane. Two birds observed at Weipa in October.

Satin Flycatcher. Only two observations recorded in Kutini-Payamu NP and Cooktown area in October during migration.

Scaly-breasted Lorikeet. An unusual two observations recorded from northern Cape York: Kutini-Payamu NP and Weipa.

Scaly-breasted Munia. Introduced. Four observations recorded in the Cooktown area.

Shining Bronze Cuckoo. Observations restricted to the eastern side of Cape York.

Southern Cassowary. Two observations recorded from Kutini-Payamu NP and Portland Roads.

Spotted Dove. Introduced. Only established breeding population on Cape York is in Cooktown, but one recorded in Weipa where the species has not previously been recorded.

Spotted Nightjar. In June and July four observations recorded in Rinyirru NP area and one record further north.

Square-tailed Kite. Three observations recorded in Kutini-Payamu NP, Rinyirru NP, and Cooktown during July through September.

Star Finch. Observations recorded in Rinyirru NP during June through December.

Stubble Quail. One observation recorded in Rinyirru NP in November.

Tawny Grassbird. One observation recorded in Rinyirru NP, and another observation recorded in Cooktown in November through December

Topknot Pigeon. Two observations recorded in Cooktown area in April and October, and one observation at Rinyirru NP in November.

Wandering Tattler. One bird observed at Kutini-Payamu NP in August.

Wedge-tailed Shearwater. Three birds observed off the east coast in January, and one observed off the northwest coast in July.

White-browed Woodswallow. Three records in Kutini-Payamu NP in August and December.

White-throated Nightjar. Two observations recorded in Kutini-Payamu NP in August and one observation in Rinyirru NP in November.

White-winged Tern. A single bird was observed at Weipa in July, and another observed at Lockhart River in December.

Willie Wagtail. Only three observations recorded north of Rinyirru NP in June, September, and December.

Wood Sandpiper. A few observations recorded at Weipa, on the northwest coast of Cape York, and two from Rinyirru NP.

Yellow-billed Spoonbill. Only one observation recorded in Rinyirru NP.

Zitting Cisticola. Two observations recorded in Rinyirru NP in October and December.

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