

***Psephotus* parrots of Queensland**

Text and images by Jim Sneddon

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Even among Australia's spectacular parrots those of the genus *Psephotus* stand out for their beauty. Of the four species three live in Queensland, one being endemic, while one is confined to the Northern Territory. A fifth species became extinct in the 1920s. The *Psephotus* parrots are ground-foraging seed-eaters. They have long tails and small bills and display sexual dimorphism, the females having duller plumage.

There are two subgroups. The first contains the Red-rumped Parrot (*Psephotus haematonotus*), and the Mulga Parrot (*P. varius*).



The Red-rumped Parrot (male shown above) is the most common in the genus, occurring in inland southern Queensland, though with a more extensive range in NSW and Victoria.



Pair of Red-rumped Parrots, showing sexual dimorphism



The Mulga Parrot (male shown above) is less common and more confined to the interior, though occurring in all mainland states except Victoria. The nest of these birds is usually in a tree hollow.

The other subgroup comprises the Hooded Parrot (*P. dissimilis*), which is confined to Northern Territory, and the Golden-shouldered Parrot (*P. chrisopterygius*) of northern Queensland. These birds nest in termite mounds, as did their sister species the Paradise Parrot (*P. pulcherrimus*) of southern Queensland and northern NSW, which was last recorded in 1927. Graeme Chapman has reconstructed what this bird may have looked like on its nesting mound and is appear on his website: <http://www.graemechapman.com.au/cgi-bin/viewphotos.php?c=371>.



Female Golden-shouldered Parrot at nest hole in termite mound

Male Golden-shouldered Parrot on termite mound
The Golden-shouldered Parrot is classified as endangered and is now confined to two small areas on Cape York, with its range continually shrinking. Contributing significantly to its decline has been the burning regimes of the past, which enabled melaleucas to encroach on its territory at the expense of open woodlands, allowing increased predation by butcherbirds. The parrots are more vulnerable in denser melaleuca thickets than in open grassy woodlands where, among other things, woodswallows give warning of danger.

Artemis Station near Musgrave is one of the last strongholds of the Golden-shouldered Parrot. Happily there is now an active conservation program, with clearing of encroaching vegetation and control of grazing and burning.

(This discussion has drawn on Joseph Forshaw's *Australian Parrots*, 3rd edition 2002)