



# Shrubby- understorey Specialists

Bringing *woodland* birds back



# Healthy Habitats: A Brighter Future for Woodland Birds of south-eastern Australia








Woodlands are rich habitats for many native species. 51 woodland birds are in decline across south-eastern Australia. Many of these may occur in your region.

BirdLife Australia and key partners have developed the **Temperate Woodland Bird Conservation Action Plan** with **10 functional groups**, each represented by one flagship species.

The series of **10 booklets** represent each functional group. These booklets identify **key actions for landholders, farmers, school groups and interested individuals** to together reduce bird decline in woodland habitats.

**Shrubby-understorey Specialists** are a large group of species, made up of insect-eating birds. These species depend on a healthy shrub layer and coarse woody debris within a woodland setting. A more open landscape, brought about by native vegetation clearing, lacks connected shrubby habitat. The Shrubby-understorey Specialist group is made up of ten species and is represented by the flagship\* species, the **Speckled Warbler**.

Shrubby-understorey Specialists	Distribution and core habitat	Status	Bird Fact
<p><b>Speckled Warbler *</b></p> 	<p>Found in dry forests and woodlands, often with scattered shrubs.</p>	<p>NSW – Vulnerable VIC – Endangered</p>	<p>The <b>Speckled Warbler</b> is not commonly seen and may freeze on the ground when disturbed. It can be found with mixed species flocks.</p>

Shrubby-understorey Specialists	Distribution and core habitat	Status	Bird Fact
<b>Black-eared Cuckoo</b> 	A variety of open woodlands and shrublands including along river corridors.	VIC – In Decline	The <b>Black-eared Cuckoo</b> is usually solitary. This species will lay its eggs in Speckled Warbler nests, as a parasitic breeder.
<b>Eastern Chestnut-rumped Heathwren</b> 	Low vegetation that is thick, dense heath or shrubland of sclerophyll forests.	VIC – Vulnerable SA – Vulnerable	The <b>Chestnut-rumped Heathwren</b> is rather secretive in its habits but can sometimes be seen singing from the tops of bushes.
<b>Spotted Quail-thrush</b> 	Dry and moist forest. Rocky hillsides and ridges, with leaf litter and logs/branches.	VIC – In Decline SA – Endangered	The <b>Spotted Quail-thrush</b> may be more often heard rather than seen – <i>seep</i> contact call. When disturbed, it walks quietly into cover.
<b>White-browed Babbler</b> 	Dry, open woodlands mostly west of the Great Dividing Range.	VIC – In Decline	The <b>White-browed Babbler</b> typically likes to be social and live in groups. It has a bubbling chatter ending in <i>miaaow</i> as well as a single <i>chuck</i> .
<b>Western Gerygone</b> 	Eucalypt woodlands in drier inland regions. Also Acacia shrubland.	SA – Rare	The <b>Western Gerygone</b> – its name derived from the Greek word meaning 'children of song' – sings a rising and falling series of whistles.
<b>Gilbert's Whistler<sup>#</sup></b> 	Semi-arid habitat in dry forest, woodlands and shrubland.	NSW – Vulnerable VIC – In Decline SA – Rare	The <b>Gilbert's Whistler</b> feeds on insects, predominantly on the ground or in low vegetation and likes to sing from an exposed perch.
<b>Ground Cuckoo-shrike<sup>#</sup></b> 	Semi-arid habitats including open woodland shrubland.	VIC – Endangered	The <b>Ground Cuckoo-shrike</b> feeds on the ground and walks in similar fashion to a pigeon. It is seen in pairs or small groups (<10 birds).
<b>White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike</b> 	Eucalypt forest and woodlands, as well as remnant patches in farmland and gardens.	VIC – In Decline	The <b>White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike</b> prefers to forage in the mid-storey and tree canopy; usually singly or in pairs.
<b>Crested Bellbird<sup>#</sup></b> 	Arid and semi-arid woodlands and shrublands, as well as Box-Ironbark forest, west of the Great Dividing Range.	VIC – Endangered, In Decline	The <b>Crested Bellbird</b> likes to forage for arthropods (e.g. spiders) in the leaf litter. A sedentary species.



# Key Threats & Actions

We have listed **actions** you can take to help protect and restore habitat for Shrubby-understorey Specialists:

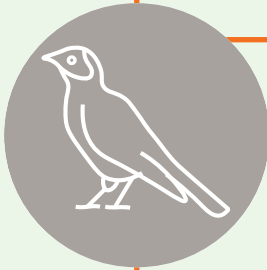
## Key Threat

## Take Action



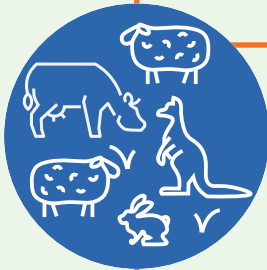
### 1 Habitat Loss & Fragmentation

Protect and fence around old mature trees or shrubs to encourage natural regeneration  
Revegetate corridors to connect or expand remnant vegetation



### 2 Competition

Restore native understorey in remnant patches or establish shrubby understorey to deter Noisy Miners or other competitors



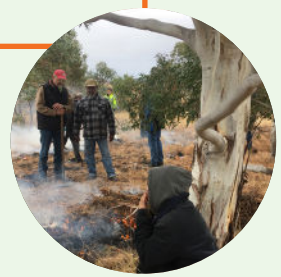
### 3 Overgrazing

Manage grazing to allow resting of paddocks and natural regeneration of native grasses  
Fence existing quality remnant vegetation to restrict grazing in habitat patches



### 4 Wildfires & Dieback

Reinstate cool or Cultural burning practices or regimes to encourage natural regeneration



## Key Threat



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### Removal of Woody Debris

Avoid collecting firewood from remnant vegetation and instead obtain firewood from sustainable sources

Limit collection/tidying of fallen logs and dead trees and keep or add woody debris on-property

## Take Action



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### Development & Urbanisation

Seek or support covenants, conservation agreements and incentives to protect high quality remnant vegetation for the long term



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### Forestry Practices

Enact Sustainable Forest permits or practices in approved logging areas

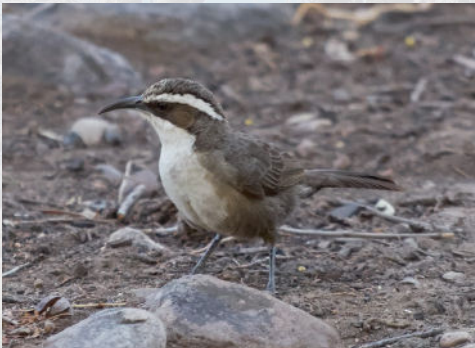
Contact your State MP urging an end to native forest logging





## Benefits beyond birds

1. **Provides ecosystem services** – small birds that forage for insects can maintain the balance for healthy woodlands by keeping insect populations in check.
2. **Retaining woody debris creates new soil** – keeping old trees, fallen logs and woody debris breaks down into new, fertile soil and provides habitat for insect pollinators.
3. **Remnant vegetation doesn't just provide habitat for birds** – it creates microclimates on farms that provide shade, shelter, wind protection and improved water cycles.
4. **Sustainable grazing** – allows the understorey to be maintained and to regenerate. Healthy habitat patches boost farm productivity, and stock welfare.
5. **Biodiversity values** – birds are an indicator for landscape health, protecting woodland birds and their habitats will sustain healthy landscapes.



White-browed Babbler, Sue McIlwraith



Shrubby understorey, Greening Australia



Chestnut-rumped Heathwren, Mick Roderick

## Habitat for Shrubby-understorey Specialists

All of the species in the Shrubby-understorey Specialists group are insectivorous, although some species will also eat seeds and fruit, as well as spiders, small amphibians, and reptiles. Most of these species feed on or close to the ground amongst native grasses, shrubs, leaf litter and under logs and branches.





Revegetation corridor, Rhonda Vile



Shrub enhancement in Box-gum woodland, Greening Australia

## Encouraging Shrubby-understorey Specialists to your property

- **Conserve and connect** woodland remnants
- **Revegetate or regenerate** shrubby understorey
- **Discourage Noisy Miners** and other pest birds
- **Minimise total grazing pressure** (particularly in high quality remnants)
- **Retain fallen logs and coarse woody debris**
- **Collect firewood** from sustainable sources
- **Keep a sustainable garden** with a shrubby understorey

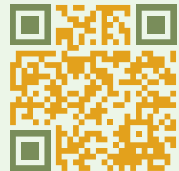
Woodland Birds  
of south-east Australia  
Identification booklet



For more information on the Temperate Woodland Bird Conservation Action Plan visit [birdlife.org.au/](http://birdlife.org.au/)

To download a free copy of the Woodland Birds of south-east Australia Identification booklet visit the BirdLife Library [library.birdlife.org.au/](http://library.birdlife.org.au/)

Download the booklets: [tinyurl.com/2y7xt4yg](http://tinyurl.com/2y7xt4yg)



This series 'A Guide to Functional Groups' has been developed by BirdLife Australia's Woodland Bird CAP Coordinator Andrea Fullagar, and Lyndel Wilson and Chris Timewell. It is an initiative of the Temperate Woodland Bird Conservation Action Plan: Engage the Wider Community Working Group partners: Greening Australia, Landcare UpHunter (NSW), Hunter GER (NSW), BioLinks Alliance (Central VIC), DEECA (Vic), Murrumbidgee Landcare (NSW) and Local Land Services (Central Tablelands NSW).

Illustrations by Nicolas Day from the *Field Guide to the Birds of Australia 8th edn.* (Penguin Publishers Australia, 2012). Illustrations (#) sourced from Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds (HANZAB).





### Did you know?

When mistletoe plants shed their leaves they are still full of moisture (most plants shed dry, desiccated leaves), creating a rich leaf litter. This ground cover harbours a variety of insects and spiders; perfect foraging habitat for insectivorous birds.

White Box woodland, Jarrad Cousin; Box Mistletoe, Mick Roderick.

BirdLife Australia is the national bird conservation charity that's fighting to save birds and the natural life systems on which they depend.

Rapid change is reducing nature's capacity to sustain every bird species. They urgently need our help to survive.

By collaborating at scale, setting ambitious goals and bringing together the best of conservation practice and sound science, we can stop extinctions and save birds.

Together with scientists, nature and birds lovers, we are urgently working to protect the most threatened species and restore local environments.



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