

Bird monitoring project

Dr Scott Field laid the groundwork for a long-term bird monitoring project both in the Waite Arboretum (WA) and Waite Conservation Reserve (WCR). The aim is to track long-term changes in bird incidence and abundance and correlate these with ongoing weed removal and revegetation efforts. In the long term, it is hoped to use the results from this project on the habitat reconstruction for Mt Lofty Ranges birds to identify candidates for reintroduction to the area. Species such as White-browed babblers and Brown treecreepers, which were once common in the area, and for which the Reserve appears to provide suitable habitat, are obvious candidates.

Although the majority of areas of the WCR and have been severely disturbed and degraded by the combined effects of logging, grazing and weed invasion, a few areas have remained relatively intact, and support a strikingly high level of avifaunal species richness. It will be interesting to track how species numbers change over time as these good areas are further improved, and the degraded areas undergo the long process of restoration. As soon as systematic and reliable surveys commence, it will be possible to identify when and under what conditions natural recolonisation occurs. Such data will be crucial for directing future management decisions aimed at conserving bird diversity in the Mt Lofty Ranges.

Although there exist few historical records of the Reserve for comparison, recent bird survey from the WCR have suggested that olive removal in Wild Dogs Glen has already improved the habitat for native birds, with Brown thornbills, White-browed scrub wrens and Golden whistlers appearing there for the first time, and over 20 species now regularly recorded from that gully alone. The total species list of birds using the Reserve is now over 60, though more thorough surveys will be needed to pin down the exact number of residents.

A bird survey form has been prepared and it is hoped that all keen birdwatchers will be able to contribute by completing a data sheet whenever they visit the Reserve and returning the sheets to Dr Jennifer Gardner. The forms are designed to be compatible with the survey techniques used by Birds Australia in their current nationwide Bird Atlas project. Observers can either carry out a 20 minutes survey at one of the two hectares sites marked on the reverse side of the sheet or record the results of an 'Area Search', which can be undertaken over any area, and over any length of time up to two weeks. Incidental sighting of rare or unusual birds can also be recorded in the Notes section. Comments and suggestions on improving the bird survey forms are welcomed.

Woodland bird numbers in the Mt Lofty Ranges are in decline generally; of the 115 originally breeding in the region, seven are now extinct, with around a dozen endangered and a similar number in decline. If habitats are not actively preserved and restored, we could lose over one third of our original bird species. The knowledge on the ecology and habitat preferences obtained from long-term monitoring project such as these will form a crucial platform of knowledge from which to launch recovery programs. So please, get involved and make your observations count!