

# Birds at the planned site of the northern prison

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For many years the planned site of the northern prison (or the Westbury Reserve as I've always known it) has been among my favourite places to watch, record and photograph birds. I have seen Wedge-tailed Eagles—and found their nest on an adjoining property—surprised a pair of Masked Owls and was lucky enough one cold frosty morning to encounter a magnificent Grey (White) Goshawk. But I don't visit the site just to see these rare and threatened species, rather, my interest is the abundance of other birds at the site.

This bush on Birralea Road does not have the tall eucalypts characteristic of the southern forests, nor the ancient gondwanan myrtle-beech of the northwest rainforests. To the uninitiated this parcel of crown land looks 'degraded' with log-strewn ground, dead and dying trees and messy understorey. ***But for many birds this is a haven—they need these things to survive, breed and thrive!***

Wedge-tailed Eagles and Fan-tailed Cuckoos—and many other species as these photographs illustrate—like to perch on dead limbs where they can scan the landscape for prey or danger; the endemic Dusky Robin prefers to perch on the vertical surfaces of stumps—it used to be referred to as 'stump bird'; and the migratory Dusky Woodswallow and Satin Flycatcher prefer dead limbs and partially dead trees for their nesting sites.

I have conducted regular bird surveys elsewhere in northern Tasmania and have consulted with colleagues. We know that many of these birds species that are generally regarded as common and widespread have declined alarmingly in the past decade. The reasons for these declines are many. What we do know is that areas of bush are fast disappearing and that all remaining habitat for these and other species ***must*** be protected as a matter of urgency.



Spotted Pardalote, 17 October 2018



The Masked Owl requires huge hollows in which to nest. Eucalypts take centuries to form cavities large enough for this endangered bird, 20 February 2007.



L: Grey Goshawk R: Brown Goshawk, photographed 1 & 6 December 2006 respectively. The high number of predatory birds attests to the richness of the site.



Dusky Woodswallows are migratory birds that prefer dry eucalypt forest with 'degraded' trees. They often build their flimsy nests between the shedding bark and trunk of eucalypts. This bird was photographed at its nest on 1 December 2006.



Grey Shrike-thrush, 8 November 2007.



L: Male and female Golden Whistler and R: young Golden Whistler, 28 Nov. 2006. The song of the Golden Whistler is one of the most familiar sounds in Tasmania's bush. The birds themselves are rarely seen as they forage high in the eucalypts on large insects and spiders.



Fan-tailed Cuckoo with hairy caterpillar, 1 December 2006. Cuckoos are important birds because they eat hairy caterpillars that most other birds avoid.



Satin Flycatchers have very particular nesting requirements. They usually locate their nests on a horizontal forked dead branch, 5-15 metres above the ground with overhanging live vegetation. The male (left) and female (right) were building their nest on 28 November 2006.



The female Satin Flycatcher collected some spiders' web from the dead branches of small wattle trees and brought it back to the nest to bind the nesting material (bark and lichen) and attach it to the branch.



Common Bronzewing, one of two species of Bronzewing recorded at the site, 27 November 2006.

Yellow-throated Honeyeater is one of four species of endemic honeyeaters found on the crown land, 27 November 2006.



Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike at its nest in the partially dead fork of a white gum, 15 December 2006.



Wedge-tailed Eagle's nest in a massive white gum (*Eucalyptus viminalis*) on the property adjoining the crown land, 7 November 2006.

### List of the bird species recorded at the site during acoustic and field surveys:

Brown Goshawk	Laughing Kookaburra	Golden Whistler
ES Grey Goshawk (e)	Superb Fairy-wren	Grey Shrike-thrush
ES Wedge-tailed Eagle (e, EN)	Striated Pardalote	Satin Flycatcher
Masked Owl (e, VU)	Spotted Pardalote	Grey Fantail
Common Bronzewing	E Tasmanian Scrubwren	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
Brush Bronzewing	Brown Thornbill	Dusky Woodswallow
Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo	E Yellow Wattlebird	Forest Raven
E Green Rosella	E Strong-billed Honeyeater	Silvereye
Blue-winged Parrot	E Black-headed Honeyeater	Common Blackbird
Shining Bronze-cuckoo	Eastern Spinebill	Common Starling
Pallid Cuckoo	E Dusky Robin	
Fan-tailed Cuckoo	Scarlet Robin	

e = endangered TSPA 1995; EN = endangered, VU = vulnerable EPBC Act 1999  
 E before the name = endemic (found only in Tasmania); ES = endemic subspecies

This pamphlet has been produced with the support of the Central North Field Naturalists Inc. (CNFN) whose members have visited the site on several occasions during their monthly field trips. Many members participate in bird monitoring projects in northern Tasmania and share my concerns about declining bird populations.

All photographs in this pamphlet were taken at the site by Sarah Lloyd, 206 Denmans Road, Birralee.

