

Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists – Bird Routes of Griffith (Text Only Version)

1. Cocoparra National Park

is a significant vegetation remnant made up of a range of hills with a rough rocky character in an otherwise flat terrain surrounded by developed lands.

The rocks are sandstones, conglomerates and shales seamed with quartzites that have been warped to form some spectacular scenery.

The higher ridges are timbered with Black Cyprus Pine, Dwyers' Mallee Gum, mallee and Currawang with an understorey of heaths and wattles.

Slopes and upper valleys of the range include dry sclerophyll forest (Bimble Box, Mugga Ironbark and Drooping She-oak) with stands of White Cyprus Pine.

The wider valleys such as Woolshed Flat and Pleasant Valley support White Cyprus Pine / Bimble Box woodland with an open and grassy understorey.

The area also operates as a refuge for the region's fauna and includes a significantly high native fauna species diversity.

Over 160 species of birds including 15 species of birds listed as threatened or vulnerable have been identified within the area.

These include the Major Mitchell's Cockatoo, Glossy Black Cockatoo, Grey Falcon, Barking Owl, Turquoise Parrot, Gilbert's Whistler, Painted Honeyeater, Chestnut Quail-thrush, Shy Heathwren, Hooded Robin, Diamond Firetail, Speckled Warbler, Grey-crowned Babbler, Brown and White-browed Treecreeper.

There are a number of sites that offer good birding. Store Creek, Jacks Creek and Woolshed Flats, are three serviced sites on the western side of the National Park and can be accessed via Mt Bingar Road off Myall Park Road from Yenda (see Map) Spring Hill Picnic Area lies on the south eastern corner of the national park and can be accessed via Barry Scenic Drive off the Whitton Stock Route, which crosses the Ardlethan Rd about 3-4 km east of Yenda.

2. Store Creek 34°08'43" S 146°12'35" E

Store Creek is a narrow valley with steep gorges set in Cocoparra National Park, which has excellent scenery featuring spectacular rocky waterfalls when the creek is flowing. Habitat is Cypress Pine, Dwyer's Gum and Currawang.

Facilities include: car-park, toilet, picnic area and walking trails

Interesting birds sightings include: Occasional sightings of Glossy Black-cockatoo and Major Mitchell's Cockatoo with regular sightings of Speckled Warbler, Hooded Robin, Diamond Firetail, Mulga Parrot, plus a wide range of other woodland birds.

3. Jack's Creek 34°08'02" S 146°11'52" E

A narrow valley within Cocoparra National Park with steep gorges, excellent scenery and a wide variety of birdlife. The creek runs after good rainfall.

Facilities include: car-park, toilets and BBQ picnic area, walking trails with lookouts.

Interesting birds sightings include: Double-barred Finch, Diamond Firetail, Speckled and Western Warbler, Hooded and Red-capped Robin, Gilbert's Whistler, Eastern Ringneck and Mulga Parrot, plus a wide range of other woodland birds.

4. Woolshed Flat 34°04'52"S 146°13'16" E

A wide open valley with a grassy woodland of White Cyprus Pine / Bimble Box with scattered Hop Bush, Senna and Acacias as well as many shrub and forb species, offering a range of birding habitats.

Facilities include: Car-park, picnic area, camping and toilets. **Note** this is the only designated camping area in the National Park.

Interesting birds sightings include: Wedge-tailed Eagle, Black Shouldered Kite, Little Eagle, Spotted Harrier, Red-rumped Parrot, Bluebonnet, Eastern Ringneck, Mulga Parrot, Speckled Warbler, Hooded Robin, Diamond Firetail, Black-eared Cuckoo, Spotted and Striated Pardalote, Rufous Whistler plus a range of Thornbills, Robins, Honeyeaters with occasional sightings of Major Mitchell's Cockatoo.

5. Spring Hill Picnic Area 34°10'44" S 146°17'01" E

Spring Hill Picnic Area is set in the south eastern edge of the Cocoparra National Park and is a delightful area for birding either at the lower entrance or higher amongst the rocks and waterfall.

Facilities include: Car-park, toilets and BBQ picnic area, walking trails, waterfall (after rain) and lookouts.

Interesting birds sightings include: Turquoise Parrots, Brown and White-browed Treecreeper, Grey-crowned Babbler, Painted Honeyeater Speckled Warbler, Hooded Robin, Diamond Firetail, Mulga Parrot and Eastern Ringneck, plus a range of Thornbills, Robins, Honeyeaters. Occasional sightings of Glossy Black-cockatoo.

6. Pulletop Nature Reserve

33°57'58" S 146°05'07" E

Pulletop Nature Reserve is a remnant area of the eastern mallee vegetation association. It covers an area of 145 hectares and lies on the plains bounded by the McPherson's Range and Tabbita Ridge to the west and the Cocoparra Range to the east, it is approximately 35 Km north of Griffith just off the Rankins Springs Road. There are 4 species of mallee and some patches of dense Broom Brush, Mallee Cypress Pine and many small shrubs and forbs.

Access: Pulletop NR is located at the end of Pulletop Rd which turns left off Rankins Springs Road approximately 35km north of Griffith.

Pulletop Rd is a red sand, unformed road and may be impassable in wet weather.

Facilities include: Nil

Interesting birds sightings include: Major Mitchell's Cockatoo, Southern Scrub Robin, Painted and Yellow Plumed Honeyeater, Gilbert's Whistler as well as many other woodland birds.

The rare plant, Club Phebalium, has been found here as well as Rankins Springs Grevillea.

7. Binya State Forest

Binya State Forest lies at the southern end of the Cocoparra National Park and occupies an area of approximately 4000 ha. The vegetation is predominantly a White Cyprus Pine / Box type semi-arid woodland. Bimble Box being the most common eucalypt in the mixed type. However Grey Box, Bull Oak, Mugga Ironbark, Needlewood and Wilga are also present.

Dwyer's Gum forms the dominant species on the higher ridges with Currawang and Drooping Sheoak.

The area was first traversed by Europeans with John Oxley and his exploration party in June 1817, when they reached the southern end of the Cocoparra Range. Oxley's description of the area was not favourable, as he wrote in his journal " the weather as usual fine and clear, which is the greatest comfort we enjoy in these deserts, abandoned as they seem to be by every living creature capable of getting out of them." (He must have struck the El-Nino at a bad time).

The forest has been subject to logging and thinning of the Cyprus Pine over many years which is evident. There is also ample evidence of ringbarking of the Box and other non commercial species.

Gold mining and quarrying have been carried out in the past. The quarry was used to provide ballast for the railway line(s) in the vicinity and stone for local building during the early part of the century.

The Whitton Stock Route runs through the forest and along the western side of the Cocoparra Range. It was used extensively by the Cobb & Co. coaches travelling between Melbourne and Queensland in the late 19th Century. Some of the old Cyprus mile posts and the foundations of the staging stations and hotels may be seen along the way. The area is therefore of some historic interest.

Controlled grazing has been used as a fire control strategy for many years. This has lead to some vegetation changes such as producing a relatively open understorey.

The forest is open to conservation hunting so visitors should bear this in mind when moving through the forest on foot.

The forest supports a wide diversity of wildlife including many species of birds, the species list is similar to that of the Cocoparra National Park, but is particularly reliable for Painted Honeyeater (Spring & Summer), Turquoise and Mulga Parrot, Bar-shouldered Dove, Speckled Warbler, Crested Bellbird and Splendid Fairy-wren with occasional sightings of Brown & White-browed Treecreeper, Chestnut Quail-thrush, Gilbert's Whistler and Glossy Black Cockatoo.

Although birding can be excellent anywhere in the forest there are a number of hotspots well worth a visit. These include:-

Wattle Dam	34°12'22" S	146°16'07" E
Moss Dam	34°12'12" S	146°16'02" E
The Radio Tower	34°14'08" S	146°17'30" E
The Forestry Hut	34°14'33" S	146°14'16" E
The Trolley Track / Picnic Area	34°12'50" S	146°17'01" E

Facilities include: fire trails, the picnic area offers car-park, picnic tables and walking trail to the summit of Mt Brogden which is in the Cocoparra National Park.

8. Nericon Swamp

34°13'05" S 146°02'13" E

Nericon Swamp is an open shallow saline wetland that experiences an annual wetting and drying cycle. During most years it supports large numbers of wading birds and provides resting areas for large numbers of other water birds.

Access: drive north along Wyangan Avenue / Boorga Road from Griffith, through Lake Wyangan towards Nericon, Nericon Swamp is on the right approximately 3km past the Jones Road intersection.

Facilities include: car-park, walking trails and bird hide

Birds seen include: Over 60+ species of wetland birds have been recorded including Marsh Sandpiper, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Red-necked Avocet, Black-winged Stilt with the occasional sighting of Black-tailed Godwit and Caspian Tern.

9. Campbell's Swamp

34°13'46" S 146°02'07" E

Campbell's Swamp is a shallow wetland with extensive open areas interspersed with stands of Cumbungi and Phragmites. The water plants and standing dead trees provide excellent breeding areas for many wetland birds. During most years it supports large numbers waterfowl.

Access: drive north along Wyangan Avenue / Boorga Road from Griffith, through Lake Wyangan towards Nericon. The car-park is on the left approximately 0.5km past the Jones Road intersection.

Facilities include: car-park, walking trails and bird hide

Birds seen include: Over 60+ species of wetland birds have been recorded including Freckled Duck, Blue-billed Duck, Australian Spotted Crake, Australian Spotless Crake, Baillon's Crake, Black Swan, Black-fronted Dottrel, Red-kneed Dottrel.

10. Lake Wyangan South

34°13'53" S 146°01'09" E

The south lake at Lake Wyangan is an open wetland of some depth that remains relatively full all year round and is not open to recreation. Excellent wetland for deep water birds

Access: Drive north along Wyangan Avenue / Boorga Road from Griffith, through Lake Wyangan towards Nericon, Turn left, (west) along Jones Road. The south lake is to the left approx one kilometre.

Facilities include: off road parking at the causeway and a sanctuary area to the west.

Birds seen include: Pied, Little Pied, Great and Little Black Cormorant; Australian Pelican, Australian Darter and Great Crested Grebe.

11. Griffith Sewage Ponds

34°16'30" S 146°00'07" E

A series of 6 large rectangular ponds with grassy banks, provide excellent resting sites for large numbers of waterfowl. The area is not open to the public.

Access: drive west from Griffith along Hillston Road, located on the north east corner of the intersection of Hillston and Brogden Roads, approximately 5km from Griffith Centre.

Facilities include: Nil

Birds seen include: large numbers of waterfowl including Freckled Duck, Blue-billed Duck, Plumed Whistling Duck, Musk and Pink-eared Ducks, Southern Shoveler, Grey & Chestnut Teal, Hardhead and Australian Shelduck.

12. Barren Box Swamp 34°10'40" S 145°49'40" E

(Note. Restricted Area, access to this wetland may be arranged by contacting Murrumbidgee Irrigation 69620200)

Large ephemeral swamp modified as irrigation storage and constructed wetland.

Provides excellent habitat for a wide range of wetland birds and raptors.

Access: Only by appointment, contact Murrumbidgee Irrigation 69620200

Facilities include: nil

Birds Seen Include: very large numbers of wetland birds with a wide range of raptors, including: White-breasted Sea-Eagle, Swamp Harrier, Black Falcon, Black-shouldered, Whistling and Black Kites.

13. Willbriggie Swamp 34°28'09" S 146°01'30" E

(Note Private Property. Access to this wetland may be arranged by contacting Ag Reserves Australia Ltd (Kooba Station 69605200))

Willbriggie Swamp is a small wetland fed by irrigation drainage from Kooba Station. It is surrounded by a Bimble Box / Belah association. The wetland has areas of open water enclosed by dense stands of Cumbungi. Excellent breeding site for a large number of wetland birds.

Access: drive south along Kidman Way from Griffith. Turn left past the railway crossing at Wilbriggie. Drive to end of road past rice silos.

Facilities include: nil

Birds seen include: over 60+ species of wetland and woodland birds have been recorded. An important breeding area for Great, Intermediate, Little and Cattle Egret as well as Australian White Ibis, Royal Spoonbill, Nankeen Night Heron and Little Bittern. Regular breeding also recorded for Budgerigar, Crimson (Yellow) and Eastern Rosella, Masked Woodswallow and Tree Martin. Occasional sightings of Latham's Snipe, Brolga, White-breasted Sea-Eagle, Superb Parrot, Zebra Finch, Glossy Black Cockatoo, Red-browed Finch and Diamond Firetail.

River Red Gum Forest

The vegetation of the river margin falls into the temperate woodland and semi-arid woodland classification and is predominantly of the River Red Gum type, which occurs as almost pure stands of River Red Gum - *Eucalyptus camaldulensis*. Black Box - *E. largiflorins*, Yellow Box - *E. melliodora*, River Oak - *Casurina cunninghamiana*, River Cooba - *Acacia stenophylla* may occur as associates.

The structure of the forest is largely determined by moisture availability, frequency of flooding and soil type. Close to the river on the grey clays that flood frequently the forests are the highest (30m plus) and the purest stands of the River Red Gum. As the flooding frequency reduces the forest height reduces and other associates occur with increasing frequency, Black Box on the heavy clays and Yellow Box as the soil tends to sandy loam.

Most of the Red Gum forests have been heavily harvested for many years, initially as fuel for the paddle steamers that plied the river before rail, then as sleepers to feed the ever expanding rail lines and girders for bridge building. The demand for fire wood was high until the late 1970's and declined sharply, but has been subject to a sharp rise since the mid 1980's.

The River Red Gum forests are characterised by a very thin understorey and this has been aggravated by logging and the policy of controlled grazing as fire mitigation. However, the forests remain a refuge for an impressive diversity of wildlife.

The State Forests Management Plan for the Griffith Management Area 1984 states "Wildlife represented on the area includes mammals (about 30 species including bats and introduced species), amphibians (6 species), reptiles (28 species), fish (9 species) and birds (167 species) - an impressive list, though it is probable that the number has declined since then.

The River Red Gum forests of the Griffith area are important breeding and feeding habitat for the Superb Parrot and during late winter and spring relatively high numbers can be found along the river. There has also been some relatively recent sightings of the Bush Stone-curlew, both of these species are listed as vulnerable under the Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995 (NSW).

Most of the forests are opened to the public and camping is permitted however, the lighting of fires is usually restricted or banned during the summer months due to the risk of bushfire.

Forests of interest include :-

- 14. Cuba State Forest 34° 34' 52" 146° 06' 38"
- 15. Cuba South State Forest 34° 37' 06" 146° 02' 18"
- 16. Wilbriggie State Forest 34° 32' 45" 145° 57' 02"
- 17. Whitton Punt Reserve 34° 37' 28" 146° 11' 27"

Birds seen include: Superb Parrot, Crimson (Yellow) and Eastern Rosella, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Long-billed and Little Corella (winter), Dollarbird (Summer), Sacred Kingfisher, Brown Treecreeper, Varied Sittella, Crested Shrike-tit plus Fairy-wrens, Thornbills and Honeyeaters. Along the river and lagoons a wide range of wetland birds can be found including several Ducks, Royal & Yellow Spoonbill, Great, Intermediate and Little Egret, Australian Pelican, White-breasted Sea-Eagle, several Cormorants, Darter, Sacred & Straw-necked Ibis and Pacific Heron.

More information can be found at:

www.mfn.org.au for details of natural history in the Murrumbidgee Valley and

www.griffithgateway.com for more information to make your trip to Griffith more enjoyable

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