

Birds of Arkaroola and the Northern Flinders-

A guide to identifying some of the birds that you might see.

November 2023

The Project

The project was undertaken by members of the **Friends of Vulkathunha-Gammon Ranges National Park**. Bird lists were started in 2020, when the area was still in the grip of a crippling drought which had killed thousands of wallabies and euros, throughout the park and devastate the plant communities, insects and small animals which form the food sources of birds. Fortunately, freshwater springs in the area, particularly in the gorges would have provided some water for some species. 2021 saw the start of rain events which continued into 2022 and then 2023. As the landscape began to recover, so too did bird populations along with their food sources which ranged from grass seeds to small mammals. By May 2023 the bird count had increased to over 60 species! Many of these birds had not been recorded in the area for several decades, corresponding with previous big rain events.

In 2021 when the idea of producing a bird brochure was mooted, President of the FVGRNP, Martin Caon encouraged the idea and found the funding through a Grassroots Grant from the SA Arid Lands Landscape Board to produce a foldout brochure of the "Birds of Arkaroola and the Northern Flinders Ranges- your guide to birds that you might see.". This was advised in July 2022.

The people involved.

Photos were gathered by photographers Chris Kirby and Jan Hutchinson. Additional photos were sourced from Garry Trethewey and Georgia Darter. Mark Darter's spotting abilities in the field and his ID skills were much valued.

Chris Kirby designed and collated the brochure, using skills gained from having compiled the 2022 revised Adelaide Botanic Bird Brochure. Nicki de Preu and Barbara Godfrey made a huge contribution to the fact-checking with their detailed knowledge of the birds of the Northern Flinders and their skills in proof-reading.

Pierre Cazes (guide at Arkaroola Wilderness sanctuary) contributed valuable insights into the migratory and nomadic nature of the birds in the Northern Flinders. Janet Stone made the final design of the brochure before it was handed to the printer. In the first run 10,000 have been printed and currently are being distributed to convenient points listed below.

Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary + 5000 (additional copies funded by AWS)
Copley Bush Bakery and Quandong Café
Copley Community Garden
Leigh Creek Library
Iga Warta
Nepabunna
Balcanoona- VGRNP Headquarters

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Due to the success of the brochure, funding from within the grant has been secured for a second print. Updating of the Adnyamathanha names supplied by Rosalie Richards (Adnyamathanha Language Coordinator Leigh Creek Area School)

Bird Lists 2020-2023

Bird lists were mostly compiled during the bi-annual week-long Friends visits to the Northern Flinders Ranges, within the boundaries of the VGRNP and in the Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary to the North. Most of the collecting was occasional in nature but repeat sampling was carried out at locations in several places including around the **former Balcanoona Station** where a year-round water supply from the re-vegetation watering system and the tanks provides a valuable source of water for birds, large and small mammals, and insects.

Repeat sampling was also done on the dry grasslands, woody shrubs and chenopod plains area to the south of **Balcanoona Creek** as well as the sheltered area of the mostly dry creek itself with its mature *Eucalyptus camaldulensis*, the slopes of **Balcanoona Bluff** including Vulkathunha Hill **and in the gullies** where *Eucalyptus gillii* provides habitat for honeyeaters and robins. **Balcanoona Creek** also accounted for a high number of sightings.

Other sites included the “Plains Block”, the strip of land, running down to the dunes on the shores of **Munda- Lake Frome**, where flocks of plains birds were recorded including the Crimson Chat and White-winged Fairywren. Sightings were also recorded during Water Quality monitoring trips into the gorges in the foothills, including **Weetootla, Italowie, Dr Chewings Creek, Mt McKinlay walk** and the **Grindell Hut** area. Repeat visits to **Oocaboolina**, nestled in the hills east of Nipapanha, were made over several years by Jan Hutchinson.

The most **northerly sightings** were on the road to Arkaroola, where it is not uncommon to see birds of prey perching in the tall dead trees and in **Arkaroola Village, Arkaroola Creek** and on vehicle trips to various areas within the Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary. Like Balcanoona, Arkaroola Village provides a year-round incidental source of water for birds from the Village activities, tank locations and several monitored water stations away from the Village.

A 13 km walk undertaken by 4 people in August 2023 on the **Oppaminda trail** (From Nudlamutana Hut to Arkaroola) in August 2023 resulted in sightings of two lesser-known honeyeaters, the Grey-fronted Honeyeater and White-fronted Honeyeater.

Rare sightings and vulnerable birds.

It was pleasing to see that sightings have been made in locations within the park and Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary, particularly in areas of spinifex grassland, of the Short-tailed Grasswren which is only found in rocky outcrops and *Triodia*-spinifex lands north of Arkaroola and in the Gawler ranges. Conservation status: Near Threatened (Population Stable) The exact locations of birds considered endangered are not disclosed.

<https://cdn.environment.sa.gov.au/landscape/images/Survey-Report-VGRNP-2022.pdf>

In 2022 and 2023, flocks of Painted Finches were recorded in the area for the first time in decades. During Easter, 2023 a few birds were sighted at Balcanoona and a large flock of over 30 birds was seen at **Stubbs Waterhole, Arkaroola**, but as soon as the waterhole dried up, they departed.

Motion-sensor cameras have provided some interesting bird sightings in 2022-23 especially those of **waterbirds** which are not generally associated with the Northern Flinders. In 2022 a White-faced heron and in 2023 a pair of Great Cormorants and a Swamp Harrier were captured at the Lovely Pool in Weetootla Gorge, presumably the attraction at that location is the Flinders Mogurnda, a fish which live the springs and creeks.

Migratory birds pass through the Northern Flinders on their journeys north and south. These journeys are largely seasonal. These include the Rainbow Bee-eater, Tree Martin, Welcome Swallow, Rufous Whistler and Grey Fantail. However, the majority of birds frequenting the area are classed as **Nomadic**, that is they move around in response to the rains which bring their food sources. These include Budgerigars which built to huge numbers during 2022 but by 2023 they had moved on and the flocks reduced to much smaller numbers in the Northern Flinders Some birds could be described as **largely resident**, not moving far from their water source and some birds are also seen in most habitats for most of the year.

The Bird List

The bird list contains all the birds seen from 2020 to May 2023 throughout the Northern Flinders. This includes birds recorded on eBird and those caught on motion-sensitive cameras placed at several sites across the park.

The list, arranged in alphabetical order will be updated as new verified sightings occur. The listing includes common names, scientific names and Adnyamathanha names, provided by Rosalie Richards of Leigh Creek Area School.

Chris Kirby

Useful Links

<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L2536790>

<https://data.environment.sa.gov.au/Content/Publications/Flinders-Ranges-BioSurvey.pdf>

<https://data.environment.sa.gov.au/Content/Publications/Nantawarrina-BioSurvey.pdf>

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/129023979@N05/26742095487/>