

Dr. Richard Noske's Survey Report August 2009

The primary purpose of this trip was to see what's going on in my permanent plotted locations in the paperbark woodlands and open forest in the mid-dry season that I had previously visited. This visit completes four seasons of data collection (Prior visits in Oct 08, Jan 09, May 09 and now Aug 09) on these plots, although two more are planned (Dec 09 and March 2010). The trip was also a great chance to test out my new Garmin 60 GPS unit, which has already proved invaluable in mapping habitats and bird locations, and routes to sites.

There were some interesting changes to the birds since May and June, but I'll just mention "significant" birds here. **Northern Shrike-tits** were calling a fair bit in the early morning, and I added two more plots to the plots in which I'd previously recorded them, making a total of 7 plots – and presumably 7 pairs – more than NT Parks & Wildlife have found at the Maranboy site between Katherine and Mataranka. I followed one pair in the vicinity of the nest found last year (in October), but there was no obvious nesting-building behaviour.

The most exciting news was that whilst counting at my plot called "**Red Goshawk**" nest (as tentatively identified by Johnny Estbergs), I checked the nest with binoculars to see a head slowly bob down – a male Red Goshawk!! As I drove along the main road, I saw the female perched high on a nearby dead tree, her larger size and massive legs and feet obvious even from a distance. The male was sitting again when I checked the next day, the only parts visible being the tips of the wing and tail feathers and top of the head. This bodes well for the upcoming Bird Safari (6 – 11 Sept 2009) as hopefully, they'll still be incubating or brooding young chicks.

Despite the lack of water at the "pipelines" (Maningrida – Oenpelli Road), I saw a small group of **Gouldian Finches** resting in trees at the first site, and a large group of c. 60-70 birds feeding on the ground at my westernmost plot [and very close to where we saw some during 2009 Bird Week). So there's a good chance we can locate Gouldians somewhere during Bird Safari, including the Tomkinson floodplain edges, which I barely checked this trip.

There were almost no eucalypts and Grevilleas **flowering** so the "nomadic" nectar-feeders were sparse (Banded and Rufous-throated Honeyeaters), or absent (Varied Lorikeets), but a few species of mistletoes were attracting Bandeds and other species, especially west of the pipelines. On the **breeding** front, I found nests of Jacky Winter and Lemon-bellied Flycatcher (1), and recent fledglings of White-throated Honeyeater (3 groups) and a Weebill – all good data for the future.

The car trip from Darwin to the lodge provided an opportunity to check the **sandstone outliers** approximately 10 km east of Goomadeer River crossing, about 100 km west of the lodge. Despite leaving Lakeview at Jabiru at 06:30 and no waiting at Cahill's Crossing because of the favourable tides, we arrived a bit late 09:30am; (mainly due to several unscheduled stops), to optimise our my chances of finding Grass-wrens. We stopped at two sites (about 6 km apart) where the sandstone closely approached the north side of the road. Both sites had **Sandstone Shrike-thrush**, while the second (closer) site also had **White-lined Honeyeater** and **Lavendar-flanked (Variegated) Fairy-wren**, two other Top End sandstone endemics. The habitat seemed good for Rock Pigeons, and potentially Grass-wrens, but had suffered from recent and perhaps regular burning, reducing the area of old Spinifex, and consequently, the chances of it supporting Grass-wrens and possibly even Rock Pigeons.