

Birds of the Timor Caves Area

In a series of surveys over 2005/2006, Hunter Bird Observers Club recorded 100 bird species in the Timor Caves area. Another 20-30 species might reasonably be expected to be present with more extensive surveys over a longer period of time.

A feature of the area was the large number of musk lorikeets (*Glossopsitta concinna*) present, especially in summer. Sightings of this colourful nectar lover were widespread through the area. The species only occurs irregularly any further to the east within the Hunter region. In summertime, birds were feeding on the plentiful blossom of the *[what species was in flower then??]*. In addition, some musk lorikeets were found to be nesting near Isaacs Creek in late spring of 2005. Breeding by musk lorikeets is an uncommon occurrence in the Hunter region, which further highlights the significance of the Timor Caves area for this species.

Little lorikeets (*Glossopsitta pusilla*) also were plentiful in the woodlands around Timor Caves. These very close relatives of musk lorikeets are readily visible when they fly from place to place in pairs or small parties, calling noisily, but when they land in the upper level foliage they can become quite difficult to spot. Their mainly green plumage blends in perfectly with the surrounding leaves.



Musk Lorikeet at its nesting hollow (photo: Chris Herbert)



Welcome Swallow at rest (photo: Chris Herbert)

The only species found to be utilising the caves themselves were welcome swallows *Hirundo neoxena*. In the breeding season, many pairs were found to be nesting within the first two or three metres of the entrances of some of the larger caves. These agile aerialists would hawk for insects in the area outside the cave, for example, above the open woodland and grassland along Isaacs Creek, then return to the cave to feed their nestlings. The mud nests typically were spaced about one metre apart, and were built utilising ledges and crevices on the roof or else high on the walls of the cave.

Welcome swallows were plentiful in the Timor Caves area, and were present in all seasons. In summer, their close relatives, fairy martins *Hirundo ariel*, also were present in abundance. They built their nests in colonies of 10-20 pairs in the various concrete drainage culverts installed under roads in the area, and hawked for insects in the nearby paddocks. In the winter months, fairy martins migrate to the north.

Two species classified as Vulnerable in New South Wales under the Threatened Species Act were recorded in the surveys. Small parties of speckled warblers *Chthonicola sagittata* were found at four separate patches of dry woodlands and groups of diamond firetails *Stagonopleura guttata* at three locations. Much of the habitat in the area seemed suitable for two other woodland species that are listed as Vulnerable in New South Wales - brown treecreepers *Climacteris picumnus* and grey-crowned babbler *Pomatostomus temporalis*. However, despite extensive searching, neither species was found to be present.



Diamond firetail (photo: Chris Herbert)

Speckled warblers forage in pairs on the ground and in low shrubs or the lower trunks of taller trees. They were found at four separate locations in the surveys so at least four pairs of them are present in the Timor Caves area. No evidence of breeding was found, however, the species is generally considered to be sedentary and so it very likely does breed locally.

For most of the sightings, the birds were in loose company with thornbills and other small birds. This is typical behaviour for this species.



Speckled warbler (photo: Chris Herbert)

Twenty species were recorded as breeding in the Timor Caves area during the surveys - wood duck, masked lapwing, sulphur-crested cockatoo, musk lorikeet, tawny frogmouth, spotted pardalote, white-throated gerygone, brown thornbill, noisy friarbird, yellow-faced honeyeater, white-naped honeyeater, jacky winter, rufous whistler, magpie-lark, willie wagtail, olive-backed oriole, dusky woodswallow, mistletoebird, welcome swallow and fairy martin. However, many other of the species that were recorded in the area would be expected to breed locally. More intensive surveying especially in Spring would no doubt add to the list of breeding species for the Timor Caves area.

Birds of Timor Caves Area

Brown Quail
Australian Wood Duck
Pacific Black Duck
Grey Teal
Great Cormorant
White-faced Heron
White-bellied Sea Eagle
Brown Goshawk
Collared Sparrowhawk
Wedge-tailed Eagle
Australian Hobby
Nankeen Kestrel
Masked Lapwing
Common Bronzewing
Crested Pigeon
Peaceful Dove
Galah
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo
Musk Lorikeet
Little Lorikeet
Australian King-Parrot
Crimson Rosella
Eastern Rosella
Red-rumped Parrot
Pallid Cuckoo
Brush Cuckoo
Fan-tailed Cuckoo
Shining Bronze-Cuckoo
Common Koel
Channel-billed Cuckoo
Barn Owl
Tawny Frogmouth
Australian Owlet-nightjar

White-throated Needletail
Laughing Kookaburra
Sacred Kingfisher
Rainbow Bee-eater
Dollarbird
White-throated Treecreeper
Superb Fairy-wren
Spotted Pardalote
Striated Pardalote
White-browed Scrubwren
Speckled Warbler
Brown Gerygone
White-throated Gerygone
Weebill
Brown Thornbill
Buff-rumped Thornbill
Yellow-rumped Thornbill
Yellow Thornbill
Striated Thornbill
Red Wattlebird
Striped Honeyeater
Noisy Friarbird
Noisy Miner
Yellow-faced Honeyeater
White-eared Honeyeater
Brown-headed Honeyeater
White-naped Honeyeater
New Holland Honeyeater
White-cheeked Honeyeater
Eastern Spinebill
Scarlet Honeyeater
Jacky Winter
Eastern Yellow Robin

Varied Sittella
Rufous Whistler
Grey Shrike-thrush
Leaden Flycatcher
Restless Flycatcher
Magpie-Lark
Grey Fantail
Willie Wagtail
Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike
Cicadabird
White-winged Triller
Olive-backed Oriole
Dusky Woodswallow
Grey Butcherbird
Pied Butcherbird
Australian Magpie
Pied Currawong
Australian Raven
Satin Bowerbird
Richard's Pipit
Double-barred Finch
Red-browed Finch
Diamond Firetail
Mistletoebird
White-backed Swallow
Welcome Swallow
Tree Martin
Fairy Martin
Rufous Songlark
Silvereye
Common Starling
Common Myna