

# Superb Parrot



Linda Unwin 2018



Wilson Lennard 2014



The Superb Parrot (*Polytelis swainsonii*) is an attractive bright green parrot, with a distinctive yellow neck and forehead and an orange blaze under the chin.

It is listed as vulnerable in New South Wales and Australia. There are fewer than 5,000 – 10,000 birds remaining in the wild.

In the Murray region, it nests between September and January in River Red Gum tree hollows along the Murray and Edward/Kolety Rivers. Over the nesting period, flocks of males feed together and travel to and from foraging sites where they collect food for the brooding females. Foraging sites are usually within 10km from the nest site. Males may make 2-3 flights each day from nests to foraging areas and back, during which time the females do not leave the nest other than to be fed by the male.

Throughout the rest of the year, Superb Parrots forage in the surrounding grassy box woodland, White Cypress Pine woodland, Boree woodlands and grasslands of the Riverine Plains, away from the major rivers. Most of the foraging habitat is on private land. Superb Parrots feed mainly on the ground, and sometimes in trees and shrubs. They eat the seeds of grasses and plants, fruits and berries, nectar, flowers and some insects.

The Superb Parrot has suffered a decline in range and abundance over the last 100 years. Major threats include clearing and degradation of nesting and foraging habitat, disturbance around nesting sites, competition for nest hollows, trapping for the pet trade and road kills.

## Distribution

The Superb Parrot is found throughout inland south-eastern Australia. It occurs throughout the inland slopes and plains of NSW, including the ACT, and extends into northern Victoria.

The breeding range of the Superb Parrot includes the River Red Gum forests along Murray River, Edward and Murrumbidgee Rivers where birds are present during spring-summer. The birds then move out into the Box-Gum, Pine and Boree Woodlands of the Riverina plains in the non-breeding months.

On the South-western Slopes, the core breeding area is roughly bounded by Cowra and Yass in the east and Grenfell, Cootamundra and Coolac in the west. Birds breeding in this region are mainly absent during winter when they migrate north and west as far as the upper Namoi and Gwydir Rivers.



Roger Williams 2012 [birdlifephotography.org.au](http://birdlifephotography.org.au)

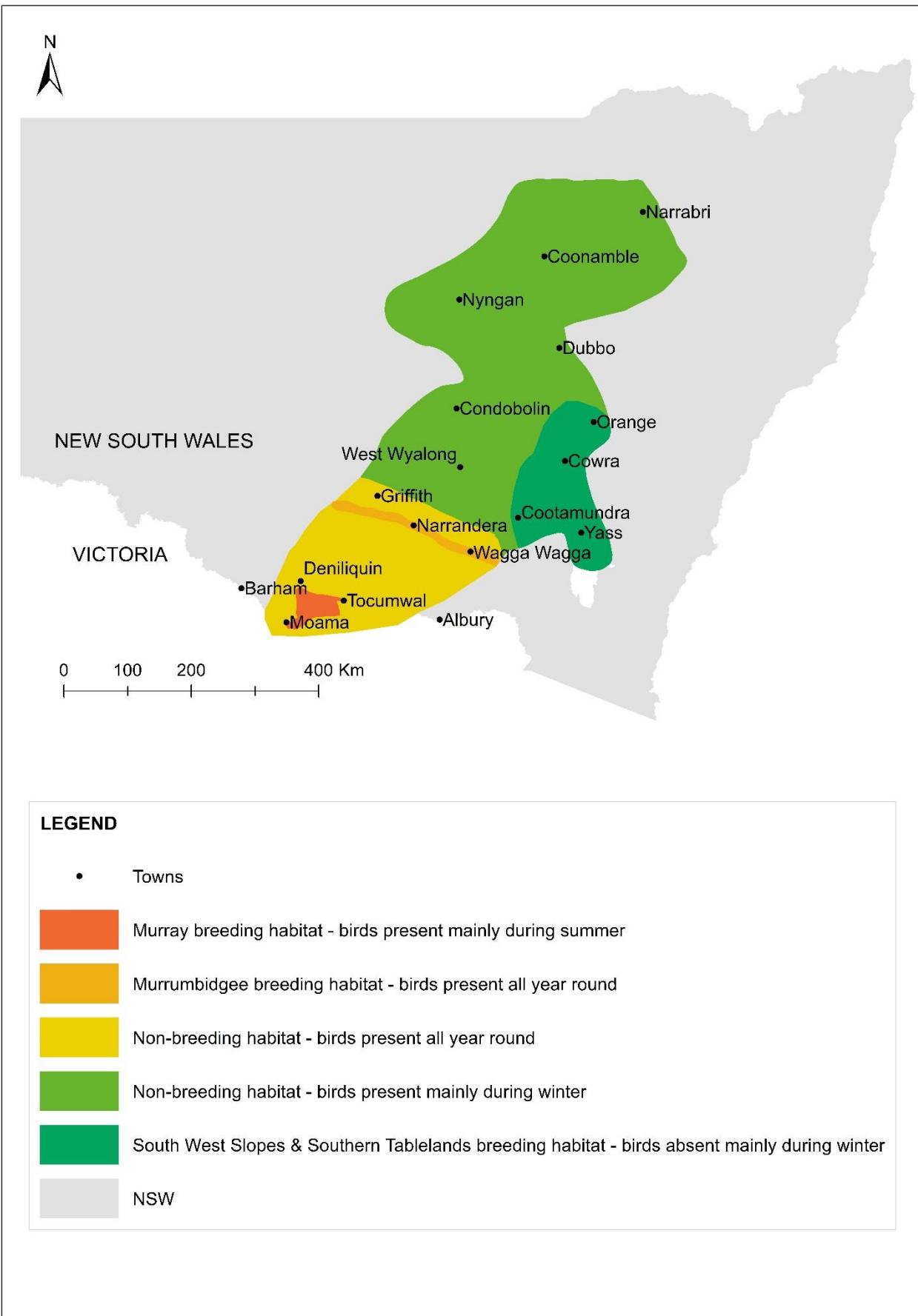


Figure 1: Superb Parrot distribution, indicating the general area of occurrence throughout the year and location of breeding areas.

## Identification

The Superb Parrot is a medium to large-sized parrot (~40 cm long), with a swift and graceful flight. It has a long, narrow tail, backswept and pointed wings and an aerodynamic body for fast flight.

Both male and female are mostly bright green, though the male has a yellow forehead, cheeks, and throat with a red band across the upper chest. The female is a slightly duller green with a light blue wash with red thighs and patches of pink on the inner walls of the tail feathers. Females do not have the red and yellow head markings. Both males and females have a red iris and a bright pink bill. Immature birds are similar to females, with young males being a slightly brighter green.



Chris Tzaros

## Behaviour & Ecology

The Superb Parrot is found along timbered waterways and nearby well-watered woodlands, especially in River Red Gums along the Murray and Murrumbidgee Rivers. On the South West Slopes, nest trees can be in open Box-Gum Woodland or isolated paddock trees.

Superb Parrots are highly mobile, but their movement ecology is poorly understood. Most birds undertake regular seasonal movements between breeding and non-breeding areas, although some birds remain in the breeding range throughout the year.

Superb Parrots nest between September to December in hollows found within large, old eucalypts. Before nesting, Superb Parrots congregate into small flocks. During September, females disappear from these flocks to begin nesting and do not reappear until the chicks have hatched and are well developed.

Over the nesting period, flocks of males feed together and travel to and from foraging sites where they collect food for the nesting females. These journeys occur two or three times a day, over the first four weeks of the breeding season. Superb Parrots typically forage within 10 km of nesting habitat.

Superb Parrots feed on the ground and in trees & shrubs, on a variety of plant species. Their diet includes the seeds of Wallaby-grass (*Austrodanthonia spp.*), Barley-grass (*Hordeum leporinum*.), Wheat (*Triticum aestivum*) and Oats (*Avena sativa*), Silver Wattle (*Acacia dealbata*), Deane's Wattle (*Acacia deanei*), and Gold Dust Wattle (*Acacia acinacea*). Superb Parrots feed on flowers, nectar and fruits of Eucalypts, Mistletoe (*Amyema miquelii*, *Amyema quandang*), Dwarf Cherry (*Exocarpos strictus*), and lerps taken from Eucalypt foliage.

Superb Parrots lay 4 – 6 eggs that are incubated by the female for approximately 22 days before hatching. Nestlings are fed by both parents for approximately 40 days before fledging.

It is estimated that Superb Parrots live for 25 years or more.

## Threats

Threats to Superb Parrots include:

- Loss of living and dead hollow-bearing trees.
- Loss of breeding and foraging habitat.
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- Poor regeneration of nesting trees and food resources.
- Loss of habitat from private native forestry activities.
- Feeding on grain spills and subsequently being struck by vehicles.
- Loss of hollows to feral bees and native and exotic hollow-nesting birds.
- Illegal trapping which can also destroy hollows.
- Illegal shooting of birds in orchards.
- Lack of knowledge of population trends in the Superb Parrot.
- Lack of knowledge of key flight paths and corridors of the Superb Parrot.
- Loss of habitat trees from fire damage during hazard reduction and stubble burns.
- Lack of knowledge about the breeding ecology and breeding success of this species.
- Competition with Noisy Miners for breeding and foraging habitat and resources.



Chris Tzaros

## Restoring Superb Parrot Flyways

The Restoring Superb Parrot Flyways project aims to restore Superb Parrot foraging habitat in the Mulwala-Savernake district of the NSW Murray region.

This project will work with landholders to restore foraging habitat and flyways for Superb Parrots by:

- protecting remnants containing hollow-bearing trees by fencing and excluding grazing stock;
- planting and direct seeding of known food plants for Superb Parrots, such as Yellow Box (*Eucalyptus melliodora*), Gold-dust Wattle (*Acacia acinacea*), Silver Wattle (*Acacia dealbata*), Deane's Wattle (*Acacia deanei*), Wallaby Grass (*Austrodanthonia spp.*), Wedge-leaf Hopbush (*Dodonaea viscosa cuneata*), Creeping Saltbush (*Atriplex semibaccata*); and
- creating revegetation flyways to improve connectivity between foraging and breeding habitat including paddock trees with hollows where possible.

*By protecting habitat for the Superb Parrot, you will also help many other native species that live in similar habitats across our forests and woodlands.*

## Help Superb Parrots by:

- Protecting breeding and feeding areas
- Retaining isolated farm trees, dead trees and tree with hollows
- Planting native trees, shrubs and grasses for habitat and feeding
- Preventing grain spills and watch out for the birds feeding along roads
- Managing hazard reduction and stubble burns to avoid damaging large hollow-bearing trees that Superb Parrots nest in
- Reporting suspected illegal bird trapping, egg collection or sales to NPWS.
- Sharing your Superb Parrot sightings to the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE) threatened species team via the ‘Superb Parrot Monitoring Project’: <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/animals-and-plants/threatened-species/saving-our-species-program/threatened-species-conservation/featured-projects/keeping-up-with-the-superb-parrot>

## More Information

- Restoring Superb Parrot Flyways Project  
<https://www.lls.nsw.gov.au/regions/murray/programs-and-projects/restoring-superb-parrot-flyways>
- NSW Government's Superb Parrot profile:  
<https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/threatenedspeciesapp/profile.aspx?id=10645>
- Birdlife Australia: <http://birdlife.org.au/bird-profile/superb-parrot>



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