

# Bird Watching

*guide to the Macleay Valley*

Purple Swamphen



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Produced by Macleay  
Landcare Network 2017

# Bird watching guide

This is a lovely part of the world with plenty of places for a day or half day birding trip. It includes the coastal strip of beaches, estuaries, dunes and cliffs. Beyond this is the Macleay River and its vast floodplain, an area of fluctuating water levels and rich farming country where there are always birds. Inland from Kempsey is the


upper Macleay valley, an area of drier woodlands and small farming communities. This whole area is surrounded by some of the wildest country in NSW with vast National Parks. With all this variety, there are over 300 species of bird waiting to be discovered and the casual or keen observer will always find something new and special.

This guide heads you to the best places to go birding and gives a selection of the birds to be found at each. Stay in Kempsey, one of the coastal villages or at a remote camp. You can use the map at the end of this guide to help you put your birding itinerary together.

## Around Kempsey

If time is tight try a little birding around Kempsey itself. There's a good cross section of common birds to see, try:

### **1. Kempsey Park and Information**

**Centre** – west of Macleay Valley Way and south of town. Extend your search to **Gills Park**, south on the highway, over the railway bridge and to the east side of the road for smaller bush birds. 

**Birds to look for:** lorikeets, cuckoos, Rainbow Bee-eater, butcherbirds, Olive-backed Oriole and honeyeaters. At Gills Park, wrens, thornbills, gerygones, Scarlet Honeyeater, Eastern Yellow Robin, fantails and whistlers.



Brolga



Wood Sandpiper

**2. Riverside Park** - along the north bank of the river and further west at the end of Kemp St you can access the river bank. 

**Birds to look for:** water birds. Darter, cormorants, Pelican, White-bellied Sea-Eagle, ducks, herons and Azure Kingfisher and woodland birds including, lorikeets, Kookaburra, Blue-faced and Scarlet Honeyeater.

## The Lower Macleay floodplain

An area with excellent birding spots. There are lots of birds and a chance of the iconic or rare birds of the area.

**3. Seale Rd Belmore Swamp** – 7km from Kempsey along Crescent Head Rd, left to Seale Rd. The swamp is a further 4km and birding from here is excellent with bush birds in the melaleuca

woodland. The best spot is the open water a further 3km. Continue east along the river to the intersection with Loftus Rd which connects Gladstone and Crescent Head Rd. No facilities.




**Birds to look for:** the raptors are great with Sea Eagle, Harriers, Black-shouldered Kite, Peregrine and Hobby and others all possible. Black-necked Stork and Brolga are seen often. There are many ducks and swans with cormorants, herons and waders with Jacana, Stilts and even Wood Sandpiper possible. There are Bittern in the reeds and crakes and rails too but these are not easily seen. Near the first bridge over the river Night Herons and both Spoonbills roost. In the melaleuca swamp, Brush and Shining-bronze Cuckoo, Forest Kingfisher, White-winged Triller and Woodswallows are possible.



**4. Belmore River Left Bank Rd – Continuing from site (3)** takes you to Gladstone with the floodplain to the west and the river to the east. Cross the bridge at the Loftus Rd intersection, it's worth taking it slowly and checking the culverts, channels, distant swamps and also the fig trees.

**Birds to look for:** *Black-necked Stork, Striated and Nankeen Night-Heron, Whistling Ducks, other common water birds as well as Figbirds, Bowerbirds and fruit pigeons in the fruiting trees. Grey Goshawk is a possibility.*

**5. Barnett's Lagoon and Gladstone – 11 km from Kempsey along South West Rocks Rd** is Barnett's Lagoon, it usually has water birds. Gladstone is a good place for a break and there are birds along the river and in the park. A detour along Old Station Rd, 3km from Kempsey can be good if the gums are flowering and Verges Rd will take you south to site (3).

   in Gladstone




**Birds to look for:** *Whistling Ducks, Spoonbills, other ducks and herons at the lagoon. Honeyeaters and lorikeets in the parks in Gladstone with perhaps Osprey, Sea Eagle, Figbirds, Blue-faced Honeyeater and Spangled Drongo.*



Black-necked Stork



White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike

**6. Jerseyville and Boyters Lane – continue 16km from Gladstone on South West Rocks Rd to Jerseyville.** Just before the village, if the tide is low, there will be waders on the mudflats, parking is difficult so take care. Continue on through the village and take the second left into Boyters Lane. Anywhere along this road is good for birds. There is public land with a bird hide to the right as you arrive. The rest of the area is private land. The birds are best seen by walking along the road.    Off Plummers Lane on the north side of the bridge.

**Birds to look for:** *just about anything is possible, all the raptors, Black-necked Stork, Brolga, egrets, spoonbills and ibis, ducks, including Hardhead, Shoveler and Pink-eared, crakes and rails, waders – dotterels, curlews, godwits, sandpipers, stints and perhaps knots. There are also Azure Kingfisher, cuckoos, Red-backed Fairy-wren, Cisticola, Mangrove Gerygone and other woodland and grassland birds. Look for terns, cormorants, pelicans and waders on the mudflats and sandbars. There have been some very rare vagrants over the years including Lesser Yellowlegs and Northern Shoveler*

**7. Rainbow Reach – from site (6) retrace your steps to Jerseyville and turn right into Plummers Lane** and over the bridge, after a kilometre turn right into Suez Rd, follow this to the end. As you return, turn right into Rainbow Reach Rd for more birds.

**Birds to look for:** *check the fields as well as the wetlands and when you get to the river check this out too. Pacific Golden Plover, Greenshank and others at high tide, Osprey, Brahminy Kite and Sea Eagle on the river and the reeds hide rails, other water and wetland birds.*



Rainbow Bee-eater




## The Coastal Strip

The communities along the coast, South West Rocks, Hat Head and Crescent Head offer great birdwatching. All offer beach holiday facilities with National parks nearby.



Osprey

**8. South West Rocks – 37km from Kempsey via South West Rocks Rd.** Access the river and South West Rocks Creek via Gordon Young Dr and New Entrance Rd, with several spots to stop and check the creek for waders, Mangrove Gerygone, Satin and Leaden Flycatchers.


**9. Arakoon and Smoky Cape** – with several tracks through Arakoon and Hat Head NPs. Try the access road to Smoky Cape for the rainforest understory and the headlands for heathland coastal views. 

**Birds to look for:** *Glossy Black-Cockatoo, Topknot Pigeon, Noisy Pitta, wrens, thornbills, scrub-wrens, whistlers and others by walking the forest and heathland tracks. Seabirds and raptors can be seen from the headlands.*



Pacific Black Duck

**10. Hat Head and Hungry Head – turn off the South West Rocks Rd into Hat Head Rd 8km east of Gladstone.** After 4km, enter Hat Head NP and the dry forest behind the dunes. There are several tracks giving access to the woodland. Just before the township there is wet heathland either side of the road, access via Korogoro Creek walking track. In town go through the caravan park to access the creek and beach areas and footbridge. Take this bridge to see sweeping ocean views from The Gap. Korogoro Point walking track around the headland has small rainforest stands. The Connor walking track takes you to the heathland above the cliffs. Taking Gap Rd, to the right before crossing the bridge as you enter town gives access to a track along the creek.

After 1km turn right to the Hungry camping area from where you can get up on to the cliffs and the other end of Connor walking track.  at the beach access.

**Birds to look for:** *in the forest bush birds particularly when the Swamp Mahoganies are flowering, noisy mixed flocks of honeyeaters and lorikeets, including Striped Honeyeaters and Spinebills. Look closely as surveys for Regent Honeyeaters and Swift Parrots are conducted here annually. The heathlands hold Red-backed, Superb and Variegated Fairy-wren, Southern Emu-wren and Tawny Grassbird. The creek has waders and Striated Heron and at Hungry Head there are good woodland birds and on the headland Red-backed Fairy-wren and views of sea birds when the weather is right.*






Lewin's Honeyeater






Glossy Black-Cockatoo

### **11. Crescent Head, Race Course and Big Hill south of the town**

**– 19km along Crescent Head Rd.** At the roundabout turn left to the beach through the caravan park. Check out the beaches and Little Nobby headland. Also along Killick Creek, the north bank via the footbridge and the south bank via Willow St. Walk around the golf course to the heathland above the cliffs. Alternatively access this via Skyline Drive.    at the beach

**Birds to look for:** *Osprey, Sooty Oystercatcher and Pipit plus sea birds at Little Nobby. Waders and striated Heron along Killick Creek if the tide is low. Superb, Variegated and Red-backed Fairy-wren, Emu-wren, Peregrine and bush birds on the headland.*

**12. Baker Drive** takes you 13km south past Goolawah NP to Race Course, and on to **Big Hill and**

**Melaleuca** camp site. There are rainforest birds here, water birds on the creek and heath birds.   

**13. Belmore Street, heads north** from Crescent Head through to Gladstone and Belmore Swamp. There are three tracks into Hat Head NP for bush and heath birds.

Check the powerlines as you go for Forest and Sacred Kingfisher, Bee-eaters and Dollarbirds. The bush might yield Common Bronzewing, Cicadabird and Ryan's cut has Greenshank in summer. No facilities

Photographs © Peter West






Eastern Yellow Robin

## The Upper Macleay valley

Upriver from Kempsey the valley is lined with drier forests with small rainforest patches. There's also a different suite of birds and even some of the Western birds that would normally be found further west. The road to Armidale provides access, but is dirt beyond Bellbrook. From this there are many minor, often dirt, roads flanked by dry woodland.

**14. Yarravel NR – 16km along Armidale Rd** holds dry woodland birds. The entrance is not that clear so take care.

**Birds to look for:** *woodland birds, Brown Cuckoo-Dove, Brush Cuckoo, Variegated Fairy-wren, Buff-rumped and Yellow Thornbill, honeyeaters, and Cicadabird.*

**15. Temagog Rd – a further 9km along Armidale Rd**, turn left into Temagog Rd. Head for the crossing of Temagog Creek 5kms from the turning, crossing the Macleay River on the way. Look for birds at both bridges. There are also crossings at Toorooka and Bellbrook which are worth looking at. You could look at returning to Kempsey down Willi Willi Rd via Sherwood.    at Willawarrin show ground.

**Birds to look for:** *around the river bridges, water birds, raptors, ducks, cormorants and herons. Small bush birds, Silveryeyes, wrens, thornbills and honeyeaters in the bush beside the river. At Temagog creek are more interesting birds including Peaceful Dove, Brush Cuckoo, Koel, Bee-eater, wrens, thornbills, White-throated Gerygone, honeyeaters, Leaden Flycatcher and Double-barred Finch.*



Scarlet Honeyeater



# Birds of the Macleay Valley

The 309 species on this list represent all resident and regularly occurring migrants, plus birds that occur in the valley from time to time. Rare vagrants and sea birds that are truly pelagic such as albatross and petrels etc, are not listed.

Australian Brush-turkey	Pied Cormorant	Beach Stone-curlew	White-winged Black Tern
Stubble Quail	Australian Pelican	Australian Pied	White-fronted Tern
Brown Quail	Black-necked Stork	Oystercatcher	Common Tern
King Quail	Australasian Bittern	Sooty Oystercatcher	Crested Tern
Plumed Whistling-Duck	Little Bittern	Black-winged Stilt	Silver Gull
Wandering Whistling-Duck	Black Bittern	Red-necked Avocet	Glossy Black-Cockatoo
Musk Duck	White-necked Heron	Pacific Golden Plover	Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo
Black Swan	Great Egret	Red-capped Plover	Galah
Australian Wood Duck	Intermediate Egret	Double-banded Plover	Long-billed Corella
Pink-eared Duck	Cattle Egret	Lesser Sand Plover	Little Corella
Australasian Shoveler	Striated Heron	Greater Sand Plover	Sulphur-crested Cockatoo
Grey Teal	White-faced Heron	Black-fronted Dotterel	Rainbow Lorikeet
Chestnut Teal	Little Egret	Red-kneed Dotterel	Scaly-breasted Lorikeet
Northern Mallard	Eastern Reef Egret	Banded Lapwing	Musk Lorikeet
Pacific Black Duck	Nankeen Night-Heron	Masked Lapwing	Little Lorikeet
Hardhead	Glossy Ibis	Comb-crested Jacana	Australian King-Parrot
Australasian Grebe	Australian White Ibis	Australian Painted Snipe	Crimson Rosella
Hoary-headed Grebe	Straw-necked Ibis	Latham's Snipe	Eastern Rosella
Great Crested Grebe	Royal Spoonbill	Black-tailed Godwit	Swift Parrot
Rock Dove	Yellow-billed Spoonbill	Bar-tailed Godwit	Red-rumped Parrot
White-headed Pigeon	Osprey	Whimbrel	Eastern Ground Parrot
Spotted Dove	Black-shouldered Kite	Eastern Curlew	Pheasant Coucal
Brown Cuckoo-Dove	Square-tailed Kite	Terek Sandpiper	Eastern Koel
Emerald Dove	Pacific Baza	Common Sandpiper	Channel-billed Cuckoo
Common Bronzewing	White-bellied Sea-Eagle	Grey-tailed Tattler	Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo
Brush Bronzewing	Whistling Kite	Wandering Tattler	Shining Bronze-Cuckoo
Crested Pigeon	Brahminy Kite	Common Greenshank	Little Bronze-Cuckoo
Peaceful Dove	Black Kite	Marsh Sandpiper	Fan-tailed Cuckoo
Bar-shouldered Dove	Brown Goshawk	Wood Sandpiper	Brush Cuckoo
Wonga Pigeon	Collared Sparrowhawk	Ruddy Turnstone	Oriental Cuckoo
Wompoo Fruit-Dove	Grey Goshawk	Great Knot	Pallid Cuckoo
Superb Fruit-Dove	Spotted Harrier	Red Knot	Powerful Owl
Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove	Swamp Harrier	Sanderling	Southern Boobook
Topknot Pigeon	Wedge-tailed Eagle	Red-necked Stint	Sooty Owl
Tawny Frogmouth	Little Eagle	Pectoral Sandpiper	Masked Owl
White-throated Nightjar	Nankeen Kestrel	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	Barn Owl
Australian Owlet-nightjar	Brown Falcon	Curlew Sandpiper	Eastern Grass Owl
White-throated Needle-tail	Australian Hobby	Painted Button-quail	Azure Kingfisher
Fork-tailed Swift	Peregrine Falcon	Brown Skua	Laughing Kookaburra
Wedge-tailed Shearwater	Brolga	Pomarine Jaeger	Forest Kingfisher
Flesh-footed Shearwater	Purple Swamphen	Arctic Jaeger	Sacred Kingfisher
Sooty Shearwater	Lewin's Rail	Long-tailed Jaeger	Rainbow Bee-eater
Short-tailed Shearwater	Buff-banded Rail	Common Noddy	Dollarbird
Little Penguin	Baillon's Crake	Black Noddy	Noisy Pitta
Australasian Gannet	Australian Spotted Crake	Sooty Tern	Superb Lyrebird
Australian Darter	Spotless Crake	Little Tern	Rufous Scrub-bird
Little Pied Cormorant	Dusky Moorhen	Gull-billed Tern	
Great Cormorant	Eurasian Coot	Caspian Tern	
Little Black Cormorant	Bush Stone-curlew	Whiskered Tern	

White-throated	Little Wattlebird	Olive Whistler	Jacky Winter
Treecreeper	Regent Honeyeater	Golden Whistler	Scarlet Robin
Red-browed Treecreeper	Red Wattlebird	Rufous Whistler	Flame Robin
Brown Treecreeper	White-fronted Chat	Little Shrike-thrush	Rose Robin
Green Catbird	Scarlet Honeyeater	Grey Shrike-thrush	Pale-yellow Robin
Regent Bowerbird	Tawny-crowned	Australasian Figbird	Eastern Yellow Robin
Satin Bowerbird	Honeyeater	Olive-backed Oriole	Golden-headed Cisticola
Superb Fairy-wren	Brown Honeyeater	White-breasted	Australian Reed-Warbler
Red-backed Fairy-wren	New Holland Honeyeater	Woodswallow	Tawny Grassbird
Variiegated Fairy-wren	White-cheeked	Masked Woodswallow	Little Grassbird
Southern Emu-wren	Honeyeater	White-browed	Rufous Songlark
Yellow-throated Scrubwren	Brown-headed Honeyeater	Woodswallow	Brown Songlark
White-browed Scrubwren	White-throated	Dusky Woodswallow	Silvereye
Large-billed Scrubwren	Honeyeater	Grey Butcherbird	White-backed Swallow
Speckled Warbler	White-naped Honeyeater	Pied Butcherbird	Welcome Swallow
Weebill	Blue-faced Honeyeater	Australian Magpie	Fairy Martin
Brown Gerygone	Noisy Friarbird	Pied Currawong	Tree Martin
Mangrove Gerygone	Little Friarbird	Spangled Drongo	Bassian Thrush
White-throated Gerygone	Striped Honeyeater	Rufous Fantail	Russet-tailed Thrush
Striated Thornbill	Australian Logrunner	Grey Fantail	Common Starling
Yellow Thornbill	Spotted Quail-thrush	Willie Wagtail	Common Myna
Yellow-rumped Thornbill	Eastern Whipbird	Australian Raven	Mistletoebird
Buff-rumped Thornbill	Varied Sittella	Forest Raven	Double-barred Finch
Brown Thornbill	Black-faced Cuckoo-	Torresian Crow	Red-browed Finch
Spotted Pardalote	shrike	Leaden Flycatcher	Nutmeg Mannikin
Striated Pardalote	White-bellied Cuckoo-	Satin Flycatcher	Chestnut-breasted
Eastern Spinebill	shrike	Restless Flycatcher	Mannikin
Lewin's Honeyeater	Barred Cuckoo-shrike	Black-faced Monarch	House Sparrow
Yellow-faced Honeyeater	Cicadabird	Spectacled Monarch	Australasian Pipit
Fuscous Honeyeater	White-winged Triller	Magpie-lark	European Goldfinch
Bell Miner	Varied Triller	White-winged Chough	
Noisy Miner	Crested Shrike-tit	Paradise Riflebird	

Summer migrants seen between  
September and April

Winter migrants seen between  
March and October

## Further Afield

If you have more time and are feeling adventurous try some of the remote parks around the valley, dirt roads are often the only access.

To the north is **Yarriabini NP** with wet and dry forest, **Grassy Head** and the wetlands of the Macleay River Arm. West of **Eungai Creek** village is Cedar Park at **Ngambaa NR** where you can find Emerald Dove, Wompoo Fruit –Dove, Noisy Pitta and Superb Lyrebird. Both could be visited on a day trip. **Killiekrankie Mountain** at New England NP, where the elusive Rufous Scrub-bird can be found or

at least heard, is further afield.

To the West is **Oxley Wild Rivers NP**, roads are few and access very limited. Above the escarpment the birds change to the Western woodland birds and it's worth exploring but too far for a day trip.

To the South there is **Limeburners Creek NR** for Australasian Bittern, Ground Parrot, Grass Owl and Lewin's Rail. Access is along Maria River Rd and there are walking tracks into the reserve. The road is dirt but good and the birding excellent.

Further west are **Kumbatine, Willi Willi** and **Werrikimbi NPs** with wet forest, rainforest gullies and again at the top of the hills the Rufous Scrub Bird, Olive Whistler and Paradise Riflebird. If you're going here, consider a closer overnight stay.

The board walk at **Sea Acres NR** at Port Macquarie (entry fee applies) is a good day trip. Here one can walk through the rainforest and find Brush Turkeys, Powerful Owls, Wompoo Fruit dove and other rainforest specialists



## How to get the best from this guide

- All the sites in this guide have public access. Please don't trespass on private land.
- Directions and distances are taken from the Information Centre on Macleay Valley Way as you enter the southern end of Kempsey unless otherwise stated.
- Go quietly in search of birds, that way you will see far more and have the best experience.
- Many birds are migratory and are only here for part of the year. Check the bird list for more information.
- The water levels of fresh water wetlands and the state of the tide have a major impact on the birds. See the text for details.
- Keep the bird's well-being in mind at all times. If you think you're disturbing them, then leave them in peace. Nests are a very special place so please always keep your distance.

## Key Biodiversity Area

The Macleay floodplain and coastal strip comprise part of the Hastings Macleay Key Biodiversity Area (KBA), designated for such rarities as the Regent Honeyeater and Swift Parrot. These are dependent on flowering Swamp Mahogany and Forest Red Gum. Also the Australasian Bittern is a resident in the swamps. Sadly these rare and endangered birds are rarely seen.

## Local information

[www.macleaylandcare.org.au](http://www.macleaylandcare.org.au)  
[www.macleayvalleycoast.com.au](http://www.macleayvalleycoast.com.au)  
[www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au](http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au)  
[www.hastingsbirdwatchers.org.au](http://www.hastingsbirdwatchers.org.au)  
 (for bird lists and field trips in and beyond Port Macquarie)  
[www.bellingen.nsw.gov.au](http://www.bellingen.nsw.gov.au)  
 (search for 'birds' to download a bird guide to Bellingen, Dorrigo and Surrounds).