



## Birds Of Fraser

Fraser Island has some 354 recorded bird species and a number of the island's birds are considered rare or vulnerable. Many birds, subject to international bird migratory treaties, visit Fraser Island during the year.

Fraser Island provides a range of habitats and it is only through the conservation of these habitats that the island can retain its rich abundance of bird life.

The best times to observe birds are early mornings after sunrise and mid to late afternoons and a great range of birds can also be seen by walking through a variety of vegetation types.

The ground parrot (*Pezoporus wallicus*) is one of the rarest and least commonly sighted birds on the island. This green and yellow ground dwelling bird lives among coastal heath sedges. It constructs a nest at or near ground level from surrounding vegetation and usually lays 3-4 eggs.

Red and green king parrots (*Alisterus scapularis*) can be seen eating nuts, berries and fruits. Other brightly coloured parrots and lorikeets observed flying high amongst the tree tops feeding on nectar or blossoms are the gregarious rainbow lorikeets (*Trichoglossus haematodus*) and the scaly-breasted lorikeets (*T.chlorolepidotus*).

Nectar-feeding birds include the honeyeaters with their long thin, curved beaks. White-cheeked honeyeaters (*Phylidonyris nigra*), Lewin's honeyeaters (*Meliphaga lewinii*) and the smallest of the honeyeaters, the richly-coloured scarlet honeyeaters (*Myzomela sanguinolenta*) are common all year.

The male grey shrike-thrush (*Colluricincla harmonica*) develops a beautiful song voice during the breeding season from August to December. The male mistletoe bird (*Dicaeum hirundinaceum*) also has a distinctive, clear song. This tiny, glossy, blue-black and scarlet bird can be seen among mistletoe plants.

Tiny red-backed fairy-wren (*Malurus melanocephalus*) can be spotted moving quickly through the dense tea tree shrubs and surrounding bush. During the breeding season from August to February, the male red-backed fairy-wren develops prominent red and black plumage to attract his mate who retains a plainer brown plumage all year.

The kookaburra, the largest kingfisher, does not have the brilliant blues of the smaller forest kingfisher (*Halcyon macleayi*) or the green of the sacred kingfisher (*H. sancta*). The sacred and the forest kingfisher are migratory birds and in summer make nests in termite mounds in the trees.

The azure kingfisher (*Ceyx azurea*) has a rich, glossy blue plumage on its back and sides and an orange or buff-coloured chest. This small bird appears full of character as it sits on low hanging branches or roots, frequently giving out a



hrill squeak before darting off to catch fish.

Sometimes mistakenly called a kingfisher is the rainbow bee-eater (*Merops ornatus*) whose colours become iridescent as the sun catches them. Rainbow bee-eaters make their nests by tunnelling into sand dunes and creek banks. Bee-eaters catch insects on the wing, including bees and wasps, returning to their perch to remove the sting from the insects before swallowing them.

The whip-like call of the eastern whipbird (*Psophodes olivaceus*) is often the only sign of this secretive bird, as it spends most of its time camouflaged among fallen logs and leaves foraging for insects. Also difficult to see is the brown quail (*Coturnix australis*) as it blends in with the wet swampy areas and banksia thickets where it searches for insects and seeds.

Nocturnal birds, such as tawny frogmouths (*Podargus strigoides*) and owls (*Tyto sp.*) can sometimes be observed at night, swooping silently down from the trees to catch prey. During the day the tawny frogmouth roosts on branches and is difficult to see as its mottled grey and brown plumage helps it to resemble a dead branch or stump.

Eighteen birds of prey species have been observed on Fraser Island. One of the largest of these raptors is the white-bellied sea eagle (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*) which has a wing span of two metres or more. Also commonly seen are brahminy kites (*Haliastur indus*) with their distinctive and contrasting chestnut brown and white feathers.

The osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*), another bird of prey, also commonly known as the fish-hawk, uses its talons to snatch prey from the water. Because of river pollution by toxic pesticides, osprey numbers in some areas are declining but they are quite common on Fraser Island.

Many wading birds are seen on the island and some migrate from as far away as Siberia. The largest migratory wader, the eastern curlew, (*Numenius madagascariensis*) can be seen from August to March and whimbrels (*N. phaeopus*) from September to April. A resident wader, the pied oyster catcher (*Haematopus longirostris*); can often be seen at low tide looking for bivalve molluscs.

Sea birds are often seen diving into the ocean after fish. Brown boobies (*Sula dactylatra*) and Australasian gannets (*Morus serrator*) often catch fish from around the jetty at Kingfisher Bay. Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax spp.*) and darters (*Anhinga melanogaster*) can be spotted on yacht masts and branches drying their wings.