



Kangaroo Island endemic subspecies
and species of concern information cards

Activity 1: Become an expert and communicate

For Activity 1: Become an expert and communicate, students research one or more of the Kangaroo Island bird species listed in these Birds of our Island: Kangaroo Island endemic subspecies and species of concern information cards, as well as other resources available. They then communicate their knowledge to the rest of the class so that all students know about each bird.

The bird information in these cards is sourced from Birds of Kangaroo Island: A Photographic Field Guide by Chris Baxter (ATP, Hindmarsh, 2015) and Kangaroo Island Bird Identification: Helping to monitor the impacts of Fire booklet (BirdLife Australia, 2022).



Photo: Peter Hastwell

Kangaroo Island (KI) endemic subspecies

Kangaroo Island is home to 16 subspecies of birds found nowhere else in the world, making them endemic to the island. These subspecies have been isolated from their mainland cousins during the almost ten thousand years that the island separated from the mainland and have adapted to the unique environment.

They may look similar but have slight differences in physical features such as plumage, size, features and even their calls. For example, the KI Crimson Rosella is slightly bigger with bolder colours, and the KI Purple-gaped Honeyeater is larger and darker. The KI New Holland Honeyeater has a smaller beak and wings, while the KI White-browed (or Spotted) Scrubwren has streaking on its breast.



Kangaroo Island (KI) species of concern

In the 2019-20 wildfires, 15 of the endemic bird subspecies of Kangaroo Island lost 30%-80% of their habitat. As a result, the KI Glossy Black-Cockatoo, KI Western Whipbird, and KI Southern Emu-wren are all national priorities for recovery on Kangaroo Island. There is also concern for the KI Purple-Gaped Honeyeater and KI Shy Heathwren.

Other species of concern include the Beautiful Firetail, Bassian Thrush, KI Purple-gaped Honeyeater and Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo. These birds are also found on South Australia's mainland, but the Kangaroo Island populations and their critical habitats have been heavily impacted by the fires.

Previously considered an endemic species, genetic

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testing has shown the KI Southern Boobook is part of the Southern Australian Boobook population. Due to known decline of the species on the mainland, the extensive habitat loss and other threats, it is now also a species of concern on Kangaroo Island. Monitoring these species is critical to ensure their survival.



Photo: Andrew Peacock

Wildfires contribute to threatened species listings

In December 2021, eight Kangaroo Island (KI) endemic subspecies were added to the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act List of Threatened Species. The KI Western Whipbird, KI Southern Emu-wren, KI White-eared Honeyeater and KI Brown-headed Honeyeater are now listed as Endangered in Australia.

The KI Striated Thornbill, KI Little Wattlebird, KI Shy Heathwren and KI Crimson Rosella are now listed as Vulnerable in Australia. The KI Glossy Black-Cockatoo was listed as Endangered in 2000.

The Bassian Thrush was changed from Vulnerable to Endangered in April 2022, also recognizing its increased risk of extinction.

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Kangaroo Island Southern Emu-wren



Endemic subspecies and species of concern. Endangered (AUS); Rare (SA).

Description

They are a tiny light brown bird with black stripe-like markings on their backs. They have a long, thin tail. The male has a light blue bib and eyebrow. They are only 15-18cms.

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Behaviour

Kangaroo Island Southern Emu-wrens move quickly through thick shrubs searching for food in pairs or small groups. They can only fly short distances and are shy, so only leave the safety of the bushes briefly to call, look around, or run to the next shrub.

Feeding

They eat insects, larvae and small spiders.

Habitat

Mallee or coastal heath with thick shrubs like tea-tree, banksia and hakea.

Breeding

From Sept-Jan. They make a small nest in a shrub or grasses, usually with 3 eggs.

Kangaroo Island Glossy Black-Cockatoo

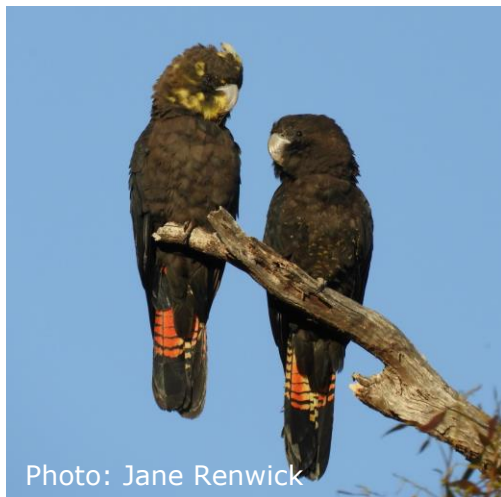


Photo: Jane Renwick

Endemic subspecies and species of concern.
Endangered (AUS & SA).

Description

The Kangaroo Island Glossy Black-Cockatoo is black and dark brown, with bright red tail feathers and a large beak. The female has yellow on the face and neck. They are 46-50cms.

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Behaviour

Kangaroo Island Glossy Black-Cockatoos feed in Drooping Sheoak trees in pairs or small groups.

Feeding

They have a specialised diet, and only eat the seeds of Drooping Sheoak. They leave pale 'chewings' where they have been feeding.

Habitat

Mature woodlands with large hollow trees, near Drooping Sheoak woodland.

Breeding

From Feb-Aug. They lay 1 egg in the hollow of an old tree, often a Sugar Gum.

Kangaroo Island Western (White-bellied) Whipbird



Endemic subspecies and species of concern. Endangered (AUS); Rare (SA).

Description

The Kangaroo Island Western (White-bellied) Whipbird has an olive green back and wings, and a grey belly with a white patch. Their black bib has a white 'whisker' stripe on each side. They are 25cms.

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Behaviour

Pairs make a call together that sounds as if it is from the one bird. Kangaroo Island Western Whipbirds are so secretive that the call is usually the only way to know they are there. They spend their time searching in the shrubs or leaf litter on the ground for food.

Feeding

Eats insects and larvae, spiders and centipedes.

Habitat

Forests, woodlands, shrublands, heathlands, coastal vegetation.

Breeding

From July-Nov. Makes a cup-shaped nest in a shrub or grasses and lays 2 eggs.

Kangaroo Island Purple-gaped Honeyeater

Photo: Jane Renwick



Endemic subspecies and species of concern. Rare (SA).

Description

They have a yellow belly, and olive grey back and head. They have black mask, and a purple gape (line of skin) under the eye. They have a bright yellow feather spike near the ear, and yellow stripe under the gape. They are 19cms.

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Behaviour

Kangaroo Island Purple-gaped Honeyeaters spend their time feeding busily in the leaves of thick mallee either alone, in pairs or small groups. Birds call noisily to each other.

Feeding

Eats insects and larvae, spiders, nectar, lerps and honeydew.

Habitat

Forests, woodlands, shrublands, heathlands, coastal vegetation.

Breeding

From Aug-Dec. Makes a cup-shaped nest in a shrub, laying 2 eggs.

Beautiful Firetail



Photo: Dayna Hoadley

Species of concern. Rare (SA).

Description

The Beautiful Firetail has a light brown and black striped back, and grey and black striped belly. The rump and beak are bright red. Their eye has a white ring and a black mask. They are 12cms.

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Behaviour

They forage on the ground or low in shrubs and trees in pairs or small groups.

Feeding

Eats seeds from bull oak and sheoak, tea-tree honey-myrtle and sedges. They also eat some grasses, berries and insects.

Habitat

Forests, woodlands, shrublands, heathlands, coastal vegetation. Also, roadsides and farm pasture near bushland.

Breeding

From Sept-Jan. Makes a bottle-shaped nest of grass with an entrance tunnel in a thick shrub and lays 4-6 eggs.

Bassian Thrush



Photo: Tom Hunt

Species of concern. Rare (SA); Endangered (AUS).

Description

The Bassian Thrush is brown with black markings in small crescent moon shapes. They have black eyes and dark beak. Has a beautiful, haunting song similar to a Common Blackbird. They are 28cms.

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Behaviour

Either by itself, in a pair or small group, the Bassian Thrush spends most of its time searching for food on the forest floor where it camouflages well.

Feeding

Eats insects and larvae including spiders, centipedes, worms, snails.

Habitat

Forests, woodlands, shrublands, heathlands with dense leaf litter, including bushy parks and gardens. Often near creeks and rivers.

Breeding

From Sept-Dec. Lays 2-3 eggs in a nest on a fork in a tree trunk or rotten stump.

Kangaroo Island Crimson Rosella



Endemic subspecies. Vulnerable (AUS).

Description

They have a red body and head, black and red back and black and blue wings, and blue tail. They have a white beak and blue cheeks. Juvenile (young) Kangaroo Island Crimson Rosella has a green body. They are 36cms.

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Behaviour

Kangaroo Island Crimson Rosellas spend their time foraging in eucalyptus trees or on the ground, sometimes in farm paddocks, in pairs or small flocks.

Feeding

Eats native seeds and introduced seeds including Clover and Capeweed seeds in pasture, and native and introduced fruit.

Habitat

Forests, woodlands, shrublands, heathlands, parks and gardens.

Breeding

From Sept-Jan. 4-7 eggs are laid in a tree hollow.

Southern Boobook



Photo: Jane Renwick

Species of concern.

Description

The Southern Boobook has dark brown wings and back, dotted with white, and a white and light brown streaked belly. Their eyes have dark brown feathers around them, with white eyebrows. They are 30-35cms.

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Behaviour

Nocturnal birds, the Southern Boobook feeds during the night and sleeps, perched in a tree or hollow during the day. It swoops to catch its prey on the ground or in the air and can be heard during the night calling 'Mo-poke'.

Feeding

Eats insects and larvae, and small mammals, birds, and reptiles.

Habitat

Forests, woodlands, shrublands, heathlands, coastal vegetation, farmland, parks and gardens.

Breeding

From Sept-Jan. Nests in a tree hollow, laying 2-3 eggs.

Kangaroo Island Superb Fairy-wren



Endemic subspecies.

Description

The Kangaroo Island Superb Fairy-wren male has a light blue crown, cheek and back, and dark blue throat and tail. It has a black mask and beak, and brown wings. Its belly is white. The female is brown, with a light grey belly. They are tiny birds, at 14cms.

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Behaviour

Kangaroo Island Superb Fairy-wrens search for food on the ground or low shrubs, calling to each other in small groups.

Feeding

Eats insects and larvae and small spiders.

Habitat

Forests, woodlands, shrublands, heathlands, coastal vegetation, parks and gardens.

Breeding

From Sept-Jan. Makes a rounded nest in a shrub where 4-3 eggs are laid.

Kangaroo Island White-browed (Spotted) Scrubwren

Photo: Jenni Reeves



Endemic subspecies.

Description

Kangaroo Island White-browed (Spotted) Scrubwrens are grey-brown with a white eyebrow, black mask, white line under the eye and white 'arrow-heads' on their black shoulders. They are 11-13cms.

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Behaviour

Kangaroo Island White-browed (Spotted) Scrubwrens search for food on the ground and in shrubs in pairs or small groups.

Feeding

Eats insects, larvae and spiders.

Habitat

Forests, woodlands, shrublands, heathlands, coastal vegetation, and gardens.

Breeding

From Jul-Dec. Makes a rounded nest in grasses, shrub, or pot-plant, laying 2-3 eggs.

Kangaroo Island Shy Heathwren



Photo: Dayna Hoadley

Endemic subspecies and species of concern. Vulnerable (AUS); Rare (SA).

Description

The Kangaroo Island Shy Heathwren is grey-brown with a reddish-brown rump and dark brown tail with a white tip. They have a white eyebrow and white belly with dark streaks. They are 12-14cms.

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Behaviour

Either in pairs or in small groups, the Kangaroo Island Shy Heathwren forages on the ground.

Feeding

Eats insects and larvae and spiders.

Habitat

Forests, woodlands, shrublands, heathlands, coastal vegetation.

Breeding

From Aug-Dec. Makes a rounded nest in grasses or a shrub and lays 2-3 eggs.

Kangaroo Island Striated Thornbill

Photo: Dayna Hoadley



Endemic subspecies. Vulnerable (AUS).

Description

Kangaroo Island Striated Thornbills have an olive-brown back and brown wings and tail. They have white and black streaks on their face, a white breast with brown streaks and yellow belly. They are 10cms.

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Behaviour

Kangaroo Island Striated Thornbills busily search for food in the leaves of eucalypts, calling to each other in small groups.

Feeding

Eats small insects and larvae, and small spiders, usually in the canopy.

Habitat

Forests and woodlands.

Breeding

From Aug-Dec. Makes a rounded nest hanging from a thin branch of a eucalypt and lays 2-4 eggs.

Kangaroo Island Brown Thornbill

Photo: Phil Knight



Endemic subspecies.

Description

Kangaroo Island Brown Thornbills have an olive-brown back and brown wings and tail. They have a reddish-brown rump, cream breast with grey streaks and a greyish belly. It is a tiny bird at 10cms.

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Behaviour

Kangaroo Island Brown Thornbills forage in pairs in shrubs, calling to each other noisily.

Feeding

Eats insects and larvae and spiders.

Habitat

Dense undergrowth in forests, woodlands, shrublands, heathlands, coastal vegetation, freshwater lakes and rivers, and bushy parks and gardens.

Breeding

From Jul-Dec. Makes a rounded nest in grasses, shrubs or pot plants and lays 3 eggs.

Kangaroo Island White-eared Honeyeater

Photo: Nikki Redman



Endemic subspecies. Endangered (AUS).

Description

Kangaroo Island White-eared Honeyeaters are olive-green with a black head and beak, grey crown, and a white patch below the eye. They are 21cms.

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Behaviour

Either by itself, or in a pair or small group, the Kangaroo Island White-eared Honeyeater feeds in the tops of trees, calling loudly.

Feeding

Eats insects and larvae, spiders, nectar, lerps, and honeydew.

Habitat

Forests and woodlands, often near creeks and rivers.

Breeding

From Aug-Dec. Makes a neat cup nest in a shrub or eucalypt tree and lays 2-3 eggs.

Kangaroo Island Little Wattlebird



Endemic subspecies. Vulnerable (AUS).

Description

Kangaroo Island Little Wattlebirds have dark grey back, tail and wings, with white streaks. Their belly is light grey with white streaks. They are 30cms.

Behaviour

Kangaroo Island Little Wattlebirds feed busily in trees and shrubs. They call loudly and chase other birds away from where they are feeding.

Feeding

Eats insects and larvae, spiders, nectar, fruit and berries.

Habitat

Forests, woodlands, shrublands, heathlands, coastal vegetation, near flowering eucalypt and banksia species, including parks and gardens.

Breeding

From Apr-May, Aug-Oct. Makes a cup nest in thick shrubs and lays 1-2 eggs.

Kangaroo Island Red Wattlebird



Endemic subspecies.

Description

Kangaroo Island Red Wattlebirds have dark grey back, tail and wings, with white streaks. They have a red wattle (bare hanging skin) from their throat and silver-grey cheeks. Their belly is light grey with white streaks and a yellow patch. They are 35cms.

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Behaviour

Usually feed in trees in pairs or by themselves, but sometimes in big flocks. They are bossy and aggressive toward other birds and chase them away from where they are feeding.

Feeding

Eats insects, larvae, spiders, nectar, berries, fruit.

Habitat

Forests, woodlands, shrublands, heathlands, coastal vegetation, edges of farmland pasture, parks and gardens.

Breeding

From Jul-Dec. Makes a cup nest in a tree or shrub and lays 2-3 eggs.

Kangaroo Island New Holland Honeyeater

Photo: Bruce Jackson



Endemic subspecies.

Description

They have a black body and face, with streaks of white, a white eye, and longer white feathers like a beard. Their wings and tail have yellow bars. Their belly is white with black streaks. They are 17-18cms.

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Behaviour

Kangaroo Island New Holland Honeyeaters spend their time busily feeding in shrubs in pairs or groups, calling noisily to each other. They chase other birds away from where they are feeding.

Feeding

Eats nectar, lerps, honeydew, insects, larvae and spiders.

Habitat

Forests, woodland, shrublands, heathlands, coastal vegetation.

Breeding

From Sep-Dec. Makes a cup nest in thick shrubs and lays 2-3 eggs.

Kangaroo Island Brown-headed Honeyeater



Endemic subspecies. Endangered (AUS).

Description

Kangaroo Island Brown-headed Honeyeaters have an olive-green back, rump and tail, grey wings and light grey belly. Their head is brown with a white nape (back of the neck). They have a light grey ring around their eyes and white chin. They are 14cms.

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Behaviour

They search for food in eucalypts, calling to each other as they move around in small flocks. Moves quickly and acrobatically while foraging.

Feeding

Eats insects, larvae, spiders, nectar, lerp and honeydew, usually in the canopy.

Habitat

Forests, woodlands, shrublands, heathlands, parks and gardens.

Breeding

From Aug-Apr. Makes a neat cup nest hanging in eucalypt trees and lays 2-3 eggs.

Kangaroo Island Grey Currawong



Photo: Phil Knight

Endemic subspecies.

Description

The Kangaroo Island Grey Currawong is a black bird with blackish-grey tail with a white tip and underside. They have yellow eyes and a large black beak. They are a large bird at 45-50cms.

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Behaviour

They spend their time looking for food under the bark or in branches of trees, or on the ground, either on their own, in pairs or small groups.

Feeding

Eats insects, larvae, spiders, eggs and baby birds, small mammals, reptiles, fruit, and berries.

Habitat

Forests, woodlands, shrublands, heathlands, coastal vegetation, farm pasture, orchards, parks and gardens.

Breeding

From Aug-Dec. Makes a large nest high in a eucalypt tree and lays 2-3 eggs.

Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo



Photo: Darcy Whittaker

Species of concern. Vulnerable (SA).

Description

The Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo is a large black cockatoo. They are mostly black, with body feathers edged with yellow, not visible at a distance. They have a yellow cheek patch and yellow tail panels.

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Behaviour

Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos feed in small to large, noisy flocks. They can be seen flying on slowly flapping wings.

Feeding

Their favoured food is seeds of native trees, shrubs and ground plants, and some insects. They have also adapted to feeding on the cones of pine trees.

Habitat

Rely on old growth forest with large hollows to breed but move through woodland, shrublands, heath and pine plantations to feed.

Breeding

From Nov-Mar. Nests in a large tree hollow and lays 1-2 eggs.