



Photo Barry Lyon

Fact Sheet

Golden shouldered parrot

Biodiversity Bright Spots

Cape York Natural Resource Management is working to improve the conservation status of the endangered golden shouldered parrot through a collaborative project with Northern Gulf Resource Management Group, Traditional Owners, graziers and other community members.

This brilliantly coloured bird is found in both the Cape York and Northern Gulf Management units where it inhabits savanna woodlands. Although once common and widespread across the two regions, the golden shouldered parrot has seriously declined in number and range over the past century.

Current estimates are that there are now only around 2500 parrots in existence. They now occur in two separate populations, one in central Cape York (considered the Northern population) and one in the Northern Gulf bioregion (the southern population).

As a result of its rarity and the many threats that it faces, this iconic bird is listed as Endangered in Queensland (Nature Conservation Act 1992), nationally (Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999), and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Golden shouldered parrots typically occur in pairs or small family flocks of up to eight birds. Male birds are coloured turquoise and orange with black head crowns and the signature golden feathers on their shoulders, and the females are coloured turquoise and green.

Diet

The parrots favour open country where they feed on grass-seed lying on the ground, although they have been known to pull grass stems down with their claws to reach the seed-heads.

They will move to other habitats according to seasonal seed availability. Favoured food grasses are Fire Grass (*Schizachyrium sp.*), Cockatoo Grass (*Alloteropsis semialata*), and Glimmer Grass (*Planichloa neruilemma*).

While feeding on the ground, Golden shouldered Parrots are vulnerable to attack by predatory birds, especially pied butcherbirds. However they are often for-warned of imminent attack by the distress calls of black faced Woodswallows.

The wet season is a difficult time for the parrots. Mature seed is often in short supply or covered by new grass growth making it difficult for the birds to feed on. The birds will also stop feeding during periods of heavy rain. They also utilise riparian areas for roosting and travel.

Early storm season and wet season burns may benefit golden shouldered parrots by exposing seed and enhancing available food sources. The timing and intensity of these burns is incredibly important.

Breeding

Golden shouldered parrots are also known as antbed parrots due to the fact that they nest in termite mounds. Nesting begins at the end of the wet season with the females laying four to six eggs. At this time the mound is still soft enough to excavate a nest hole and the termites will no longer 'repair' and close over the hole as they would over the wet season.

The parrots mainly nest in conical termite mounds that are between 30 to 50 years old. They rarely nest in the same mound again due to the possible presence of nest parasites.

The natural design of the termite mound offers a relatively stable temperature range which benefits the incubation of the parrot eggs.

Golden shouldered parrots also have a remarkable symbiotic relationship with a type of moth *Trisntopa scataphaga* which lay their eggs in the entrances of many parrot nests. The hatchling moth larvae then feed on parrot excreta, thereby helping to keep the nest clean.

The chicks hatch around three weeks after the eggs are laid, and are fully fledged approximately five weeks later.

To get involved or find out more

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Threats

- Natural predators include goannas that prey on eggs and fledglings, and pied butcher birds that also hunt adult birds. Feral cats are known to prey on the parrots and may pose a significant impact.
- Changes in fire regimes have resulted in negative changes to habitat condition. A lack of storm burns in places has allowed a thickening of savanna woodlands with woody plants such as the broad-leaved paperbark *Melaleuca viridiflora*. These thicker woodlands make the parrots more vulnerable to ambush by pied butcher birds than the more open habitats that existed previously.
- Food grass availability can also be significantly affected by changed fire regimes, cattle grazing that doesn't allow grass seed to mature, and ground ploughing by feral pigs; and a lack of wet season fires can contribute to starvation.
- Damage to suitable nesting mounds by cattle, particularly bulls, may also limit nesting opportunities.

This project

The Federal Government's Biodiversity Bright Spots - Woodlands project aims to increase golden shouldered parrot numbers by fostering strong partnerships between land managers currently, and wishing to be, involved in golden shouldered parrot species recovery—including language groups whose country is golden shouldered parrot habitat, wider community, scientists and government to manage species recovery activities across the Cape York NRM and Northern Gulf Resource Management Group regions to strengthen opportunities for species survival into the future.

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of this land and pay our respects to Elders, past and present, and emerging



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This project is being delivered by Cape York NRM through funding received by the NQ NRM Alliance from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program