

GOULDIAN FINCH PROJECT UPDATE

With 2019 having been a hot, dry year throughout most of the continent and culminating in the disastrous fires that devastated many SE Australia ecosystems, we wanted to see how our local Gouldians had come through this period. A few of us undertook a short visit between rain events to check on one of the North Queensland sites in early January 2020. Unlike the previous year, the site had not received significant early storm rain and so growth of sedges and grasses was correspondingly slow.

Liz, David, Gary and I soon found a scattering of Gouldians in the core area. These birds looked to be very healthy, with some also being paired and undertaking tree hollow inspections. Foraging was being undertaken mainly in recently prescribed patch burns where they were taking lightly cooked seeds (firegrass and others pending ID from Pam) as well as flowering sedges.



Fig 1 – A male Gouldian Finch singing in January 2020 – photo courtesy G Wilson.



Fig 2 - Team checking for birds in an unburnt patch in January 2020 – R Pierce.

Fig 3 – Fledgling Black-faced Woodswallows in January 2020 – R Pierce.



Fig 4 - Male Gouldian feeding in a recently burnt area in January 2020 – R Pierce

The whole area was in fact buzzing with birds reflecting a rapid response to the localised good rainfall here over the previous month. Rufous Songlarks were abundant and displaying throughout, and nomadic species like Banded Honeyeaters were also abundant. There were three species of woodswallows nesting in the area, which are important associates of Gouldians, Masked and Black-throated Finches.

We will follow the progress of these Gouldians and other finches over the coming months looking at diet, use of burnt versus unburnt areas, nest sites, brood sizes, predators via camera traps, and some other questions. We will also be surveying for Gouldians more widely in Far North Queensland to examine wider distribution. If you are wanting to help with any aspects of this project please contact Ray at raypierce@bigpond.com or Patrick at info@finchesqueensland.org or Mike at nqnhgroup@gmail.com. Skills that participants can learn include finch survey techniques such as detecting Gouldians from calls and bird associations, identifying key food grasses and sedges, characterising habitat, using motion cameras, videos, identifying birds generally, data recording, and more. The project is funded by Queensland Citizen Science, facilitated by North Queensland Natural History Group (NQNHG) and helped by many citizen scientists including NQNHG and BirdLife Northern Queensland members.

From Ray Pierce



North Queensland

Natural History Group Inc.

