

HOW CAN WE REVERSE THE LOSS OF OUR WOODLAND BIRDS?

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1. Bird species will continue to be lost from remnants, and decline in regions, even well after vegetation clearing has ceased.
2. We know the basic causes of these losses (habitat loss and fragmentation), but we know less about the ecological processes involved.
3. Different species of birds occupy different ecological niches – they forage in different ways, in different locations, on different plant species.
4. Species often compete for food, space and nest sites, and simplifying their habitat will increase this competition, allowing fewer species to survive.
5. Every change in management will favour some species of birds, but put others at a disadvantage – there will be winners and losers.
6. We need diverse management of remnant woodland within a region to sustain a full range of bird species.
7. Almost every patch of woodland has value for some species of native birds.
8. Our biggest challenge is to provide suitable habitat for the birds that live in open, grassy woodland, without the Noisy Miner dominating it.

Introduction

I have been studying birds in eucalypt woodlands and open forests around Armidale, northern New South Wales (see map on next page) for the past 30 years, along with a succession of students and colleagues. My initial interest was to learn more about their natural history: where do they feed, what do they eat and what is their breeding biology? In the 1970s, eucalypt dieback was a major issue in New England, with fears that we would lose most of our native trees in farmland as well as the birds associated with them. The trees have recovered, however, and so have some of the birds. Other birds, though, have declined, although not always the ones that we might have expected to suffer. From my background in basic ecology, I have tried to understand the ecological processes behind these declines (Ford *et al.* 2001). The environment has changed, in some cases for the better, for instance, due to extensive tree planting and