

## WORKING WITH LANDHOLDERS TO PROTECT WOODLAND BIRDS: AN 18-YEAR LESSON FROM NORTHERN VICTORIA

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1. Landholders are pivotal.
2. Conservation actions must match social expectations.
3. Scientific knowledge and dissemination of that knowledge is crucial.
4. Conservation objectives need to be defined specifically but implemented broadly.
5. Conservation actions need to be developed broadly but implemented locally.
6. Focal species are a valuable part of extension folklore.
7. There is no single solution to woodland conservation.

### Introduction

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the perilous state of Australia's temperate woodlands began to capture the attention of biologists and conservationists as the next major environmental issue to be addressed, following a previous focus on forests and rainforests during the 1970s and 1980s. The increased awareness of the plight of Australia's temperate woodlands was also driven by concern from within the agricultural sector, as dryland salinity emerged as a major threat to farm sustainability through much of southern Australia.

In 1991, with Birds Australia, I applied for funding to investigate the ecology and causes of decline of one of Victoria's well-known woodland bird species – the Grey-crowned Babbler *Pomatostomus temporalis* – as an initial means of tackling woodland conservation.

As a newish biologist, recently returned to Victoria in 1990 after a year spent working in Arnhem Land and other parts of the Northern Territory, the contrast between the fecundity and diversity of Northern Territory's natural environment and the comparative paucity of Victoria's natural environments was stark. The contrast also heightened an awareness of how much natural diversity had disappeared in Victoria and the urgent need to focus conservation attention on the protection and restoration of Victoria's endangered woodland and grassland ecosystems.