

Scaly-breasted Lorikeet

Trichoglossus chlorolepidotus

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Hunter Bird
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Scaly-breasted Lorikeet – note the bi-coloured iris (photo: Alwyn Simple)

This is the only Australian lorikeet to have an all-green head. The overall impression is of a “green bird” although it has bright yellow scales on the breast and shoulders. The underwing pattern also is distinctive – no other Australian lorikeet possesses such a broad area of red-orange underwing coverts. Birds also have a small red band on their upper scapulars. Males and females look similar, and no sub-species are recognised. Adults birds have a red bill and bi-coloured iris (the outer ring is red or orange dark brown and the inner ring is straw-yellow or yellow). Juveniles have a dark bill and dark iris – both of these change to adult coloration within about three months of fledging.

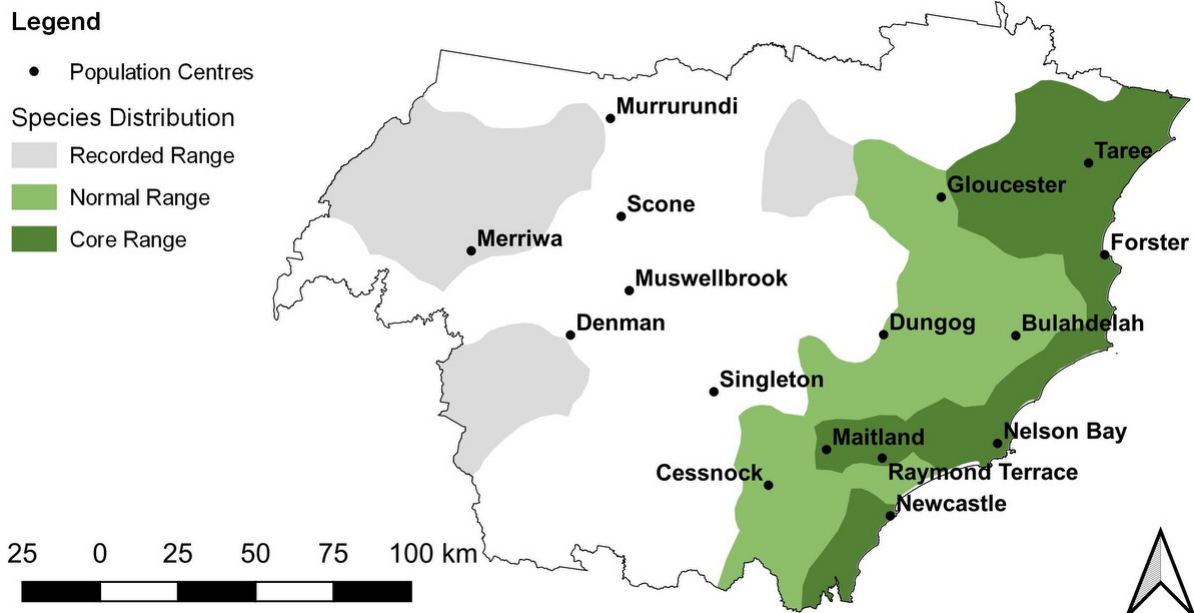


A Scaly-breasted Lorikeet gathering nectar using the tip of its tongue (Photo: Rebecca Citroni)

Regional Status

The Scaly-breasted Lorikeet is usually considered to be a breeding resident of our region, and mainly confined to the eastern parts of the region. However, within its overall range in NSW it is considered nomadic, with the birds' movements being related to the flowering of eucalypts and melaleucas. That nomadic behaviour accounts for the occasional more westerly Hunter Region records, from locations such as Goulburn River NP when there is good blossom available locally.

The main range for this species is Queensland and northern NSW. In the 19th and 20th Centuries, Sydney was about the southern limit but the range has since expanded southwards. However, from south of about Newcastle, records are much less frequent and they very much are blossom-related.

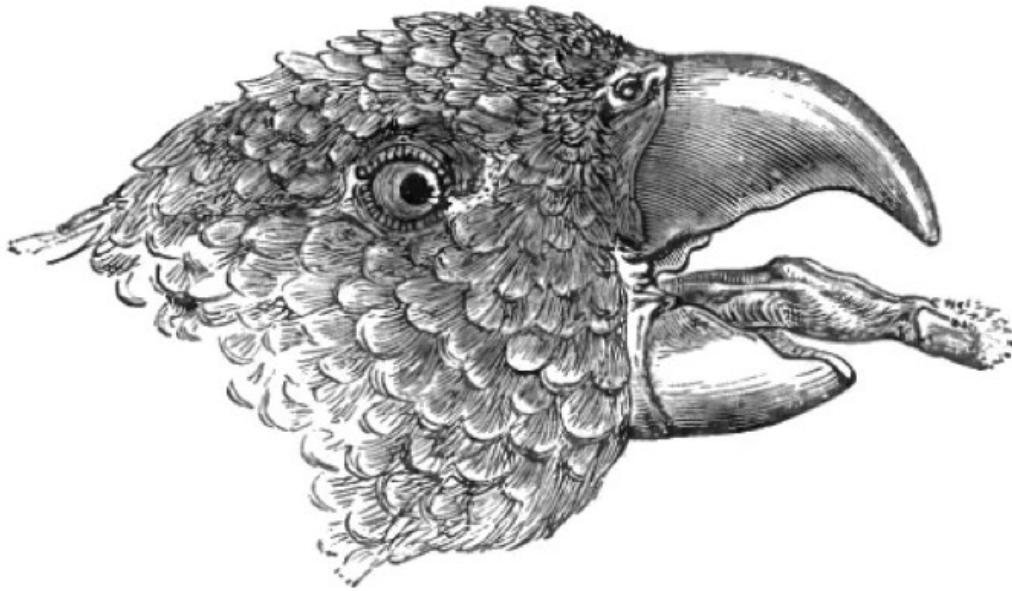


Regional distribution of Scaly-breasted Lorikeet (map by Dan Williams)

It's on the tip of my tongue

Lorikeets and some other nectivorous birds possess an unusual feature – the tip of their tongue is covered with small hairs (sometimes called papillae). Those “hairs” greatly aid the gathering of the main food source – nectar from plants.

Lorikeets have a shorter, less muscular gizzard and shorter intestinal tract than other birds. This makes them highly efficient at digesting nectar and pollen but ineffective at digesting harder foods like seeds or insects. However, they do eat soft fruits when available, and also some types of seeds and insects and their larvae (Australian Journal of Zoology 1990).



A lorikeet's tongue (source: <https://www.psittacology.com/lorikeet-tongue-diet/>)

About the name

Scaly-breasted Lorikeet

“Scaly-breasted” is descriptive (of the yellow scalloping on the breast of this species). “Lorikeet” is a diminutive of “lory”, a term often applied to mid-sized parrots and parakeets and deriving from the Malay word *luri.*, parrot. The first known uses of “lorikeet” also were in the Malay Peninsula and the nearby New Guinea.

Trichoglossus chlorolepidotus

The genus name derives from the Greek words *thrix/trichos*, hair, and *glōssa*, tongue i.e “hairy-tongue” – a direct reference to the brush-like papillae on the tip of the tongue of birds of this genus. The species name is descriptive, coming from the Greek words *khlōros*, greenish-yellow, and *lepidōtos*, scaly (from *lepis*, scale).



A pair of Scaly-breasted Lorikeets copulating – note the orange-red upper scapulars and underwing coverts (photo: Rebecca Citroni)

Design Rob Kyte at Conservation Matters 0420 821 460 Text by Alan Stuart based on information mainly sourced from • HBOC's Hunter Region annual bird report series • Volumes 1-7 of HANZAB (the Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds) • Bird in the Hand (ABSA information sheet series) • Menkhorst et al. (2017). The Australian Bird Guide • Ian Fraser & Jeannie Gray (2013). Australian Bird Names A Complete Guide • Richard Cooper, Ian McAllan and Brian Curtis (2016). Atlas of the Birds of NSW and the ACT, Vol 2

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