

SWIFT PARROT IDENTIFICATION GUIDE



COMMONLY CONFUSED SPECIES

Like the Swift Parrot, these five lorikeets nest in tree hollows and feed mainly on nectar and lerp. They will often use the same habitat, and even the same tree, as Swift Parrots. All occur on the mainland, with Musk and Rainbow Lorikeets also in Tasmania.



RAINBOW LORIKEET

Trichoglossus moluccanus

Habitat — Woodlands, open forests, heaths, urban areas. Expanding range.

Notes — Strikingly colourful lorikeet. Its underwing pattern and colour somewhat similar to Swift Parrot, but differs in having yellow on the undertail. Constantly screeching call, particularly in flight. Noisy and sociable, often in large flocks.



SCALY-BREADED LORIKEET

Trichoglossus chlorolepidotus

Habitat — Open forests, woodlands, urban areas

Notes — Occurs along east side of NSW and Qld, with small population around Melbourne. Red beak and underwing somewhat similar to Swift Parrot, but differs having an all green tail and head. Noisy screeching call.



MUSK LORIKEET

Glossopsitta concinna

Habitat — Dry open forests, woodlands, orchards, urban plantings.

Notes — Differs from Swift Parrot in having long red ear patches/cheek, and no red on wings and tail. Sociable, with large foraging flocks. Metallic screeching call made when in trees and in flight.



LITTLE LORIKEET

Glossopsitta pusilla

Habitat — Open forests, woodlands, and sometimes urban plantings.

Notes — Broadly similar red pattern on head to the Swift Parrot, but lacks blue and yellow colours. Also has no red on wings, has a short, stubby tail and is considerably smaller than a Swift Parrot. Call is a shrill, high-pitched 'zzit'. Rarely in large flocks.



PURPLE-CROWNED LORIKEET

Glossopsitta porphyrocephala

Habitat — Drier open forests, woodland, mallee

Notes — Widespread in Victoria, but few records further north. Dark-purple crown and yellow-red ear patch. In flight, underside of chest and abdomen are pale blue, short all green tail, red on underwing like Swift Parrot. Noisy call is a short harmonious 'zit-zit-zit'. Mostly in small flocks.

SIZE COMPARISON

Eastern Rosella
33cm

Rainbow Lorikeet
30cm

Red-rumped Parrot
24-30cm

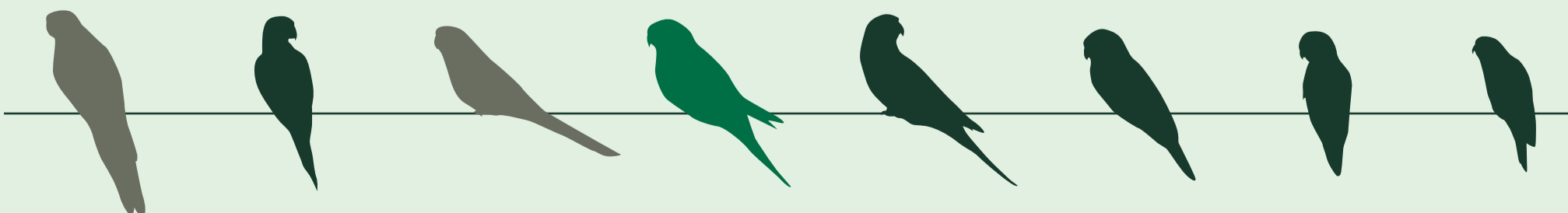
Swift Parrot
23-26cm

Scaly-breasted Lorikeet
24cm

Musk Lorikeet
20-23cm

Purple-crowned Lorikeet
17-19cm

Little Lorikeet
16-18cm



INTRODUCTION

The Swift Parrot is a medium-sized, fast flying parrot. In summer, they breed in old-growth habitat in Tasmania. All birds then fly across Bass Strait to spend autumn and winter foraging in woodland across the south-eastern Australia mainland. In spring they return to Tasmania.

SCIENTIFIC TITLE

Lathamus discolor

SIZE

23-26cm

LIFESPAN

~10 Years

POPULATION

<2,000 birds

STATUS

Critically Endangered

MAIN THREATS

Habitat Loss & Predation

HABITAT



Swift Parrots tend to favour certain types of trees in temperate forest and woodland, but they will also use trees (particularly large old specimens) in urban and other 'created' habitats (e.g. gardens). The tree species favoured on the mainland include:

- Grey Box (*Eucalyptus microcarpa*)
- White Box (*E. albens*)
- Yellow Box (*E. melliodora*)
- Mugga Ironbark (*E. sideroxylon*)
- Red Ironbark (*E. tricarpa*)
- Spotted Gum (*Corymbia maculata*)
- Forest Red Gum (*E. tereticornis*)
- Swamp Mahogany (*E. robusta*)

While breeding in Tasmania, they are found predominantly in stands of Blue Gum (*E. globulus*) or Black Gum (*E. ovata*).

POPULATION DECLINE



Long-term monitoring by ecologists and citizen scientists shows that the Swift Parrot population is in a perilous decline. The main culprit throughout its range is habitat loss and fragmentation – both historic and ongoing.

Additional threats on mainland Australia include aggressive and overabundant native nectarivores (like the Noisy Miner), collisions with infrastructure, and altered flowering patterns and lerp availability due to climate change.

In Tasmania large hollow-bearing nesting trees continue to be lost through logging, and Sugar Gliders (an introduced species in Tasmania) are now known as a major predator of eggs, nestlings and adult birds during the breeding season.

IF YOU SPOT A SWIFT PARROT, CONTACT US:

03 9347 0757

woodlandbirds@birdlife.org.au

For more information on the Swift Parrot or if you would like to help support our programs visit: www.birdlife.org.au

A GUIDE TO IDENTIFYING THE CRITICALLY ENDANGERED
SWIFT PARROT



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HOW TO FIND A SWIFTY

Swift Parrots aren't easy to find, but there are cues that increase your chances:

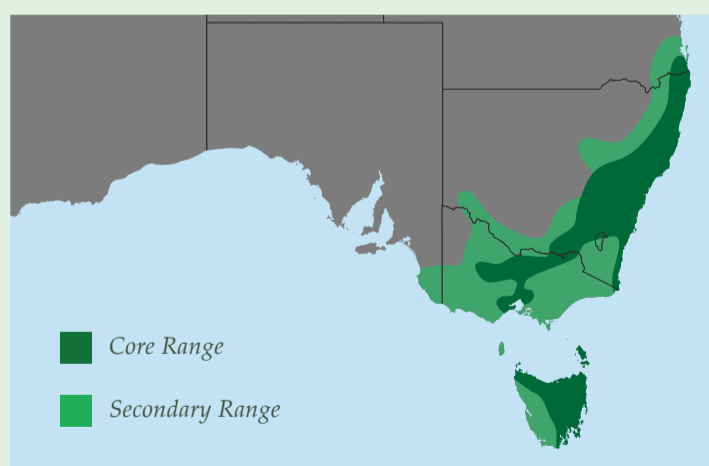
- Look for profusely flowering eucalypts (especially ironbarks, box and spotted gum).
- Search for other nectar-feeders, like lorikeets and small honeyeaters.
- Learn the calls – Swift Parrot calls have a distinctive loud 'pip-pip-pip', particularly as they fly off. This is often the only way you will know they are there. You can hear the call by visiting here: www.birdlife.org.au/bird-profile/swift-parrot

WHAT ARE LERP?

Attached to the surface of eucalypt leaves, the small pale dome-shaped lerps (< 6mm across and 1-2 mm high) are secreted by insects called psyllids as a by-product of their leaf-eating lifestyle. Full of sugars and starch, lerps are consumed by Swifties whenever and wherever available.



ECOLOGY & MOVEMENT



The Swift Parrot is a unique nectar-feeding parrot that annually migrates across Bass Strait from its summer breeding grounds in Tasmania to 'overwinter' in south-eastern mainland Australia. Some birds fly as far as coastal south-east Qld, making the world's longest known parrot migration.

On the mainland they preferentially seek eucalypt-dominated temperate woodlands with abundant blossom or lerp to feed on, but will also use urbanised areas on occasions. Breeding is tightly linked to flowering of key eucalypt species in Tasmania. They are a gregarious species and are often observed in flocks.

IF YOU SEE A SWIFTY, LET US KNOW

With such a vast potential distribution, searches and sightings by birdwatchers are critical to scientific knowledge and conservation of the Swift Parrot. One of the best ways to record a sighting is to take a photo, no matter how poor the quality may be. This can allow us to age the birds, help determine behaviour and identify the habitat they're using. Wherever possible, it is also important to document:

- Date and time of observation
- Location (as specific as possible)
- Number of Swift Parrots seen (and/or heard)
- Behaviour and other species present
- The presence of flowering eucalypts, lerp or other food sources.

CONTACT US ASAP FOLLOWING A SIGHTING:

FOR MAINLAND SIGHTINGS

BirdLife Australia Woodland Birds team:

woodlandbirds@birdlife.org.au OR call: 03 9347 0757

For more information on the Swift Parrot or if you would like to help our programs visit:

birdlife.org.au/projects/woodland-birds-for-biodiversity