

Birds and how to identify them

When you are out and about, at times you will find it hard to identify smaller birds as they move through the foliage. Many of these birds are beautiful and it is enjoyable to be able to watch and identify them. It is beyond the scope of this book to be a complete guide to bird identification - see the Resources section for useful bird field guides. However, there are some simple techniques that you can easily apply when faced with a strange bird that will help you to at least narrow down the possibilities. Once you have reduced the number of likely birds it becomes much easier to make an identification.

So - when faced with an unknown bird, how do you go about narrowing down the possibilities?

- Size** - try and compare it to what you know
- Colour** - uniform shade or does it have markings or patches of colour
- Bill** - short and thick, short and pointy, curved
- Habitat** - on the ground, low foliage, higher up in a tree
- Behaviour** - feeding on flowers, foraging on the ground
- Call** - many species have distinctive calls, best checked via an App



Let us take an example. Whilst walking near some dense vegetation you see some small brown birds (often called LBJs or Little Brown Jobs) that you are not sure about.

Weebill - note the short, thick bill

These are often the hardest for beginners and experienced birders alike! Answers to some of the above questions can quickly narrow it down. For example, if the bird is very small (smaller than a sparrow) and the bill is short and thick then you can immediately narrow it down to a pardalote or a weebill.



Spotted Pardalote - another bird with a short, thick bill

If the overall colour is greenish and plain, then most likely a weebill. If there is black on the head or wings then a pardalote. There are only two pardalotes in this area - spotted and striated so it is usually easy to pick. If the bill is thin and sharp-pointed then it is most likely a thornbill.



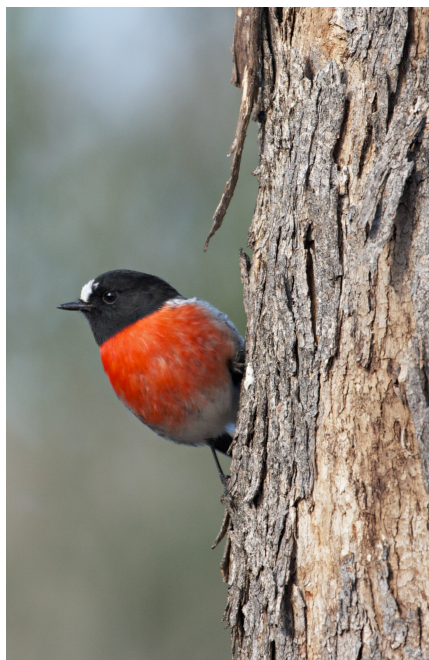
All thornbills (apart from the Weebill) have a thin, pointed bill. In this area, along with the Brown Thornbill, you are likely to see Striated, Buff-rumped and Yellow-rumped Thornbills. Behaviour and habitat also help to separate these with Striated tending to prefer the higher branches, the Buff-rumped favours the lower branches and the Yellow-rumped is more often seen foraging on the ground.

Brown Thornbill - note the longer, thinner bill

The other small birds that can cause confusion are the robins, particularly females and juveniles along with the Jacky Winter. In this area the most common of the brightly coloured robins are the Eastern Yellow Robin, the Scarlet Robin, and in winter the Flame Robin.



Eastern Yellow Robin



Scarlet Robin (L)

Flame Robin (R)



The males of each of these robins are hard to miss. However, the females and juveniles are another story as they are harder to tell apart, but there are some defining characteristics.



*Juvenile Yellow Robin -
note the beginning flecks of yellow (L)*



Flame Robin female (above)

Juvenile Scarlet Robin - a bit scruffy (below)



Apart from appearance, behaviour is often a good indicator with robins, to separate them from other possibilities. Most robins tend to sit on a low branch or twig, or sometimes a fence, and fly rapidly down the ground to catch insects before returning to their perch to survey the ground for more food. If you see a quick movement from the ground to a low perch then think robin, or sometimes a Jacky Winter. The white markings on the wing and tail are often a good indicator of Jacky Winter.

*Jacky Winter - often quite
confiding and easy to approach*





Honeyeaters are the most widespread and noisiest forest birds in the area. At times it is hard to get a good view as they often move rapidly between trees chasing each other and making a racket. The colouration of some make identification tricky, especially when you are looking up into the foliage.

Fuscous Honeyeater - note the small yellow neck marking

The Fuscous Honeyeater is one of the most common throughout the region. It is a drab, greenish bird that is hard to track at times, especially from directly below. It can easily be confused with the White-plumed Honeyeater, particularly if you are not familiar with their calls.

White-plumed Honeyeater - note the white plume

Other honeyeaters of the foliage are Brown-headed and White-naped Honeyeaters and if you are lucky the Black-chinned Honeyeater. All three can be seen foraging in the upper foliage and look somewhat similar from below and to make matters worse, all three have white napes, which at first glance can be confusing - see pictures on next page.

The other common species are the Yellow-faced, Yellow-tufted and New Holland Honeyeater (below Left to Right).

