

REEF CATCHMENTS
PRIORITY SPECIES SERIES



Important Habitat for Red Goshawk in the Mackay Whitsundays

Erythrotriorchis radiatus



OVERVIEW

The Red Goshawk is one of Australia's rarest birds of prey, listed as Endangered in Queensland and nationally under the EPBC Act in 2023. A medium-sized, powerful raptor with rich reddish-brown plumage and boldly barred underwings, it occupies extensive territories across northern and eastern Australia - including parts of the Mackay Whitsundays region.

Red Goshawks are resident and territorial, with pairs occupying the same area over many years. They are highly dependent on intact forests and woodlands near permanent water, which support the bird populations they rely on for food. Recent satellite tracking research led by BirdLife Australia's Red Goshawk team demonstrated a substantial contraction in range, leading to the species being uplisted to Endangered under Australian legislation and the IUCN Red List. (MacColl et al. 2023)



KEY HABITAT FEATURES

Red Goshawk habitat in the Mackay Whitsundays includes:

- Extensive eucalypt forests and woodlands
- Riparian corridors along rivers, creeks and wetlands
- Areas with permanent freshwater
- Large, mature trees for nesting (typically 20–30 m high)
- Old-growth forest with horizontal-limbed trees, giving them the structure to build and access nests, and to hunt by perching and watching
- Open vegetation structure to support hunting for preferred prey (e.g. kookaburras, lorikeets and cockatoos)

KEY STATISTICS

95% +

of Red Goshawk diet consists of birds

120-200 km²

typical home range per breeding pair

1-2 eggs

laid per breeding attempt

~350-500

pairs estimated remaining nationally

DISTRIBUTION & LOCAL CONTEXT

The Red Goshawk is sparsely distributed across coastal and near-coastal Australia, from the Kimberley to north-east New South Wales. Key strongholds include Cape York Peninsula, northern Queensland, and the Tiwi Islands.

In the Mackay Whitsundays, the species is rare and patchily distributed, most likely occurring in large intact landscapes including the Eungella region, riparian corridors, and lowland forest remnants.



References:

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Image credit: Chris MacColl, with thanks for generously supporting this publication.

MINIMISING DISTURBANCE

PROTECT LARGE TREES

Retain mature nesting trees, especially near waterways

MAINTAIN CONNECTIVITY

Avoid clearing woodland and forest fragments

USE APPROPRIATE FIRE REGIMES

Maintain an open understorey for hunting

PROTECT WATERWAYS

Support healthy riparian vegetation and prey populations



THREATS

- Habitat loss from land clearing for agriculture and development
- Fragmentation, reducing viable hunting territories
- Loss of large, mature nest trees, particularly near waterways
- Inappropriate fire and grazing regimes, causing dense undergrowth that limits hunting

Even small clearing events can significantly impact the species due to its large territory requirements.

IDENTIFICATION TIP

Red Goshawks are often confused with Square-tailed Kites, rufous Brown Falcons and female Swamp Harriers. Key features to look for:

- Rich rufous underparts with heavy black streaking
- Broad, deeply-fingered wings
- Large yellow feet and legs in adults
- A two-toned underside in flight, with pale barred flight feathers contrasting against a rufous body

Female

Male



Use a reliable bird identification guide or app to confirm identification, and report sightings to BirdLife Australia's Birdata..

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