

Birding

Oxley Creek Common

Brisbane, Australia



Hugh Possingham and Mat Gilfedder – January 2011

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This guide provides information about the birds, and how to bird on, Oxley Creek Common.

This is a public park (access restricted to the yellow parts of the map, page 6). Over 185 species have been recorded on Oxley Creek Common in the last 83 years, making it one of the best birding spots in Brisbane. This guide is complimented by a full annotated list of the species seen in, or from, the Common.

How to get there

Oxley Creek Common is in the suburb of Rocklea and is well signposted from Sherwood Road.

If approaching from the east (Ipswich Road side), pass the Rocklea Markets and turn left before the bridge crossing Oxley Creek. If approaching from the west (Sherwood side) turn right about 100 m after the bridge over Oxley Creek.

The gate is always open.

Amenities

The main development at Oxley Creek Common is the Red Shed, which is beside the car park (plenty of space).

The Red Shed has toilets (composting), water, covered seating, and BBQ facilities. The toilets close about 8pm and open very early. The paths are flat, wide and easy to walk or cycle.

When to arrive

The diversity of waterbirds is a feature of the Common and these can be good at any time of the day. The morning is best for scrub and grassland birds - we would recommend arriving before 7am in the summer (sunrise is about 5am) and 9am in the winter. People walking dogs, which scare a few species, often arrive at the Common very early. After heavy rain there can be minor flooding.



Path near Pelican Lagoon (MG)

A bird walk on Oxley Creek Common

The different areas of the Common have been given numbers on the map (by David Niland and Mark Roberts) to help locate observations. These are referred to in the text as Area 1, Area 2 etc. Particularly interesting species that you have a reasonable chance of observing have been marked in boldface.



White-bellied Sea-Eagle pursued by Torresian crows (HP)

1 Around the Red Shed – Area 1

Walk to The Mound beside the windmill from where you get a good view over the common, and can scan for birds of prey. Most mornings a **White-bellied Sea-Eagle** flies past clutching a flying fox from Indooroopilly Island. It is often followed by an entourage of Torresian Crows, more if it has food, less if they are just mobbing it. **Brown Falcon** and **Black-shouldered Kite** might be seen on trees and poles in the distance. Both Rainbow and Scaly-breasted Lorikeets fly over in small screeching flocks. Golden-headed Cisticola and Tawny Grassbird are common in the grasslands. Australasian Pipit or **Yellow-rumped Thornbill** (uncommon in Brisbane) can usually be seen on the mown grass around the Red Shed. In the young trees and shrubs you may see Double-barred Finch, Silvereye and maybe Golden or Rufous Whistler in the winter. Common suburban birds like Willie Wagtail, Australian Magpie and Magpie-lark are also easy to find. **Striped Honeyeater** have nested in the Hoop Pines around the BBQ.

2 Walk down to the Canoe Pontoon – Area 1

Superb Fairy-wren, White-browed Scrubwren, Silvereye, Brown Honeyeater and Bar-shouldered Doves are all common in the mangroves. While the Brown Honeyeater is here all year, the numbers rise from just a few in mid summer to over 50 in winter. An **Eastern Yellow Robin** has recently turned up and another pair can sometimes be heard from across the creek in Area 3.

Scan the mud and mangroves from the Canoe Pontoon where there is a small chance of a Striated Heron. The lilting call of the **Mangrove Gerygone** can be heard from here, and in Areas 4 and 5. This small brown bird is hard to see, it is much easier to find it by call, although making squeaking noises can attract it to you.

3 Walk along the main path – Area 2 & Area 3

There is only one walking trail leading away from the Red Shed. This runs alongside Oxley Creek. Area 2 can be a bit slow, Brown Honeyeater and Mistletoebird abound in the casuarinas, especially when the mistletoe is in flower or fruit. Stop when you get to any fence line and scan the paddocks for finches and fairy-wrens.

By Area 3 the vegetation across the creek is thicker (Nosworthy Park). Scan the big eucalypts across the creek for Galah, Noisy Miner, Common Myna (introduced), Australian Magpie and Pied Butcherbird. The highlight here is the possibility of a **Varied Triller** - it is sometimes in the canopy of small trees. You may also find Grey Shrike-thrush, Eastern Whipbird (hard to see but easy to hear) and Olive-backed Oriole (calling mainly in warmer months). Figbird and Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike often sit in trees with exposed dead branches. Watch for Brown Quail scuttling across the track and mulch.

In the path-side shrubs in Area 3 there is a good chance you will find all three local Fairy-wren species, even sitting in the same bush – be patient. Red-backed Fairy-wren have a preference for long grass and can be seen in the middle of the paddocks; Superb Fairy-wren prefer short grass or bare ground with a few bushes; Variegated Fairy-wren are usually in the denser undergrowth. Double-barred Finch is fairly common all along the creek, and if the grasses and weeds have been allowed to flourish they may be accompanied by Chestnut-breasted Mannikin and Plum-headed Finch – although the finches are more likely further on.



Brown Honeyeater (MG)



Red-backed Fairy-wren (MG)



Variegated Fairy-wren (MG)

4 The First Dip – Area 4

Go slowly as you approach and cross the First Dip. This spot is good for Rufous Whistler, Spangled Drongo, Bar-shouldered Dove and sometimes Rainbow Bee-eater. Search the grassland and scattered shrubs to the north, a good place for Pheasant Coucal, Sacred Kingfisher, Tawny Grassbird and Red-backed Fairy-wren. If it is morning the sun will be in your eyes. It is best to cross the creek quickly, pass the mature casuarinas, and turn around. Stand and wait, a Striped Honeyeater or a Little Friarbird might turn up.

A little further along the track there is a very large forest blue gum (*Eucalyptus tereticornis*) beside the creek – walk just past it and turn around so the sun is behind you. If it is winter this tree can be loaded with birds like **Scarlet Honeyeater**, Lewin's Honeyeater, Grey Fantail, Golden Whistler and Striated Pardalote. This is another good spot for Mangrove Gerygone and Double-barred Finch (which may nest in dense mistletoe clumps living off a couple of the larger melaleucas).



Rainbow Bee-eater (MG)

5 The Second Dip – Area 5

The Second Dip is a regular spot for **Australian Reed-warbler**. It sticks almost entirely to the tall reeds in the gully and is easier to hear than see. This place is a hot spot for finches (especially **Chestnut-breasted Mannikin**), Brown Quail, Fairy-wrens, Golden-headed Cisticola and Tawny Grassbird. Cross the creek and look back into the reeds or north across the paddocks. Scan the fence wires for finches. Striped Honeyeater, Little Friarbird and Blue-faced Honeyeater can often be seen in the few large eucalypts in the paddocks. Remarkably there are rarely any Noisy Miners in many parts of Oxley Creek Common, which may explain the reasonable diversity of bush birds.



Tawny Grassbird (MG)

6 Turn off to Pelican Lagoon - Area 6

Turn left taking the track from the Water Gauge towards Pelican Lagoon. You will move away from the creek and enter the grasslands which at first look ornithologically uninspiring. It is along here that some unusual species have been seen. First, this is the most reliable place on the common to see Australasian Pipit. It is often in the short grass or on the fence posts. The normal grassland species abound but also, if you are lucky, this is a good spot for **Plum-headed Finch** (look mainly north of the track, especially around the power transmission lines). A Brown Songlark was here in winter 2006 and there is a good chance of **Yellow-rumped Thornbill** if the grass is short.

In some years a Restless Flycatcher is in this area over most of the winter and early spring, while one or two Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoos often spend the spring and summer here.

Where there are cattle several farmland species tend to be about – Common Myna, Common Starling, Cattle Egret and Willie Wagtail. All stand on the cattle, and use them as a mobile perch.

While birds of prey are uncommon generally in Brisbane, from here you have a wide view so scan the horizons. Check the power lines for birds of prey like **Australian Hobby**, Nankeen Kestrel, Peregrine Falcon and Black-shouldered Kite. Brown Falcon prefer the fence posts. There is a small chance of a Wedge-tailed Eagle or Brown Goshawk in the distance.



Plum-headed Finch (HP)



Brown Songlark (MG)



Jabiru (MG)



Black-winged Stilt (MG)



Royal Spoonbill (HP)



Chestnut-breasted Mannikin (MG)

7 Jabiru Swamp - Area 8

The water level of Jabiru Swamp fluctuates a lot depending on recent rain. It is best when it is fairly full. If you arrive early there is a fair chance of **Jabiru** (the more boring proper name is Black-necked Stork) and a better chance of **Glossy Ibis**. Both species are quite flighty and can easily scare. Aside from a wide variety of waterbirds – ducks, ibis and egrets – this is the best spot for rare visits by shorebirds: Marsh Sandpiper, Pacific Golden Plover and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper have all appeared. Carefully scan the mud and banks for **Black-fronted Dotterel** and Latham's Snipe.

Most of the ducks are Pacific Black Duck and Grey Teal, but check them carefully to see if there are Australasian Shoveler or Chestnut Teal too. Hardhead may appear if the water is deep enough. Black-winged Stilt, Dusky Moorhen and Australasian Grebe all breed on Jabiru Swamp; the stilts can be cranky if breeding.

This is a great spot for egrets. The Eastern Great Egret is the biggest egret and has a strongly kinked neck; Intermediate Egret are medium-sized and have red or yellow bills; Cattle Egret are most often away from the water and have a fawn head when breeding. The fourth egret, the Little Egret, is the only one that always has a black bill (Eastern Great Egret occasionally have black bills) and yellow soles to its feet – it is a very active feeder, uncommon here and most often at Pelican Lagoon.

Fairy Martin, Tree Martin and Welcome Swallow may all be seen hawking over the wetlands. Check the large eucalypt next to where the swamp crosses the road for breeding Magpie-lark, Willie Wagtail, Common Myna, Little Friarbird and other honeyeaters.

8 Pelican Lagoon - Area 7

Approach the lagoon very slowly. **Latham's Snipe** may flush from the swampy grass anywhere around the lagoon. Purple Swamphen will be obvious in and around wet areas. Buff-banded Rail and dotterels may be feeding on or around where the track ends. Once at the end of the track search the trees for resting cormorants, ibis, Darter or **Royal Spoonbill**. Scan the lagoon for ducks, Black Swan, Australasian Grebe, Australian Pelican, Dusky Moorhen and Eurasian Coot. Scan around the edge of the lagoon for dotterels, Latham's Snipe (which may be standing still rather than flying). While big birds like the Australian Pelican and Black Swan (has bred) are easy to find, scan the reeds carefully for a new arrival, breeding Magpie Goose.

Unfortunately an aquatic weed, *Salvinia molesta*, invaded the lagoon a couple of years ago – if it is covering the lagoon the variety of water-bird species will be significantly diminished. From the very end of the track look ENE along the fence line to the end which is a good spot for interesting species. Baillon's Crake were easy to see here in the spring and summer of 2006. Anything is possible.

The end of the track is not only an ideal spot to watch for waterbirds – but the tall grass, reeds and sedges are favoured by Superb Fairy-wren, Australian Reed Warbler and Chestnut-breasted Mannikin, along with other grassland species. White-breasted Woodswallow may be hawking insects over the lagoon or sitting in the dead branches of the casuarinas.

From here you can't go any further. You can walk back (about 2 km) to the Red Shed – although those who want more exercise can turn left when you get back to Oxley Creek and head south to the Secret Forest. The Common has a few other good spots, but if you head back now you have seen the best of the common from a birding perspective.

9 Interesting spots near the Secret Forest

9a The Neck - Area 10

The section of creek before the Neck is a good spot for Sacred Kingfisher and Variegated Fairy-wren. The large eucalypt at the Neck is a magnet for all sorts of birds. Lewin's Honeyeater and **Spangled Drongo** (rare in late spring and early summer) are often here. Watch for Brown Goshawk and Collared Sparrowhawk flying low over the dense vegetation along the creek. Double-barred Finch frequent the cattle trough here, while the stand of *Melaleuca bracteata* to the left just past the Neck is excellent for both species of whistler and Grey Fantails in the winter. Wherever you find a Grey Fantail stay to watch for other species – this bird is often the core of mixed feeding flocks.



Spangled Drongo (MG)

9b Area 11

The track crosses a small gully just before it bends away from Oxley Creek. Search the shrubs here for Variegated Fairy-wren and White-browed Scrubwren. For these little bush birds you will need to be patient. Making squeaking and pishing noises may convince these timid species to jump up and give you a good view. To the right is a swampy grassy area with a few large eucalypts that occasionally has herons, egrets and ibis, especially if there has been recent rain. The eucalypts are a regular spot for Striated Pardalote.



Double-barred Finches (MG)

9c The Secret Forest - Area 12

At the Secret Forest you may encounter Noisy Miner again. Grey and Pied Butcherbirds are often here. Walk along the creek bank and scan the bamboos and trees across the creek. Nankeen Night-Heron could be roosting in the giant bamboo while Pheasant Coucal and Bar-shouldered Dove are often heard. Buff-banded Rail may be skulking under the mangroves if the tide is low.

Walking back

As you walk back to the Red Shed (a little over 2 km) be sure to scan the wires and fence posts for birds of prey and finches. Listen for the distinctive calls of the Darter, Australian Wood Duck and Sacred Kingfisher, which are scattered in small numbers along the creek. Tree Martins frequent the large lights over St. Aidan's Sports field on the other side of Oxley Creek.



Wedge-tailed Eagle (MG)

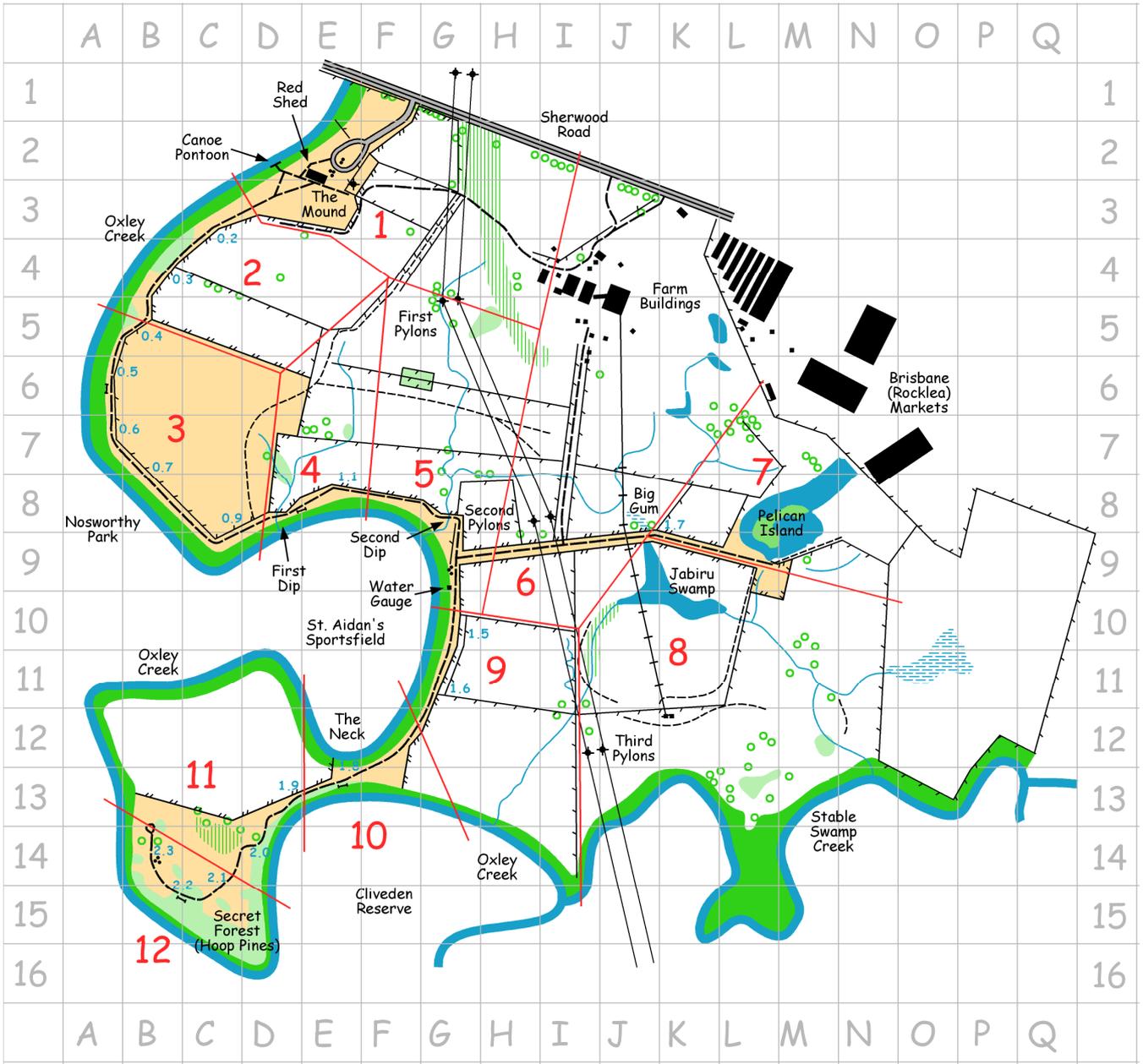
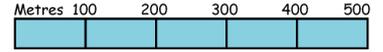




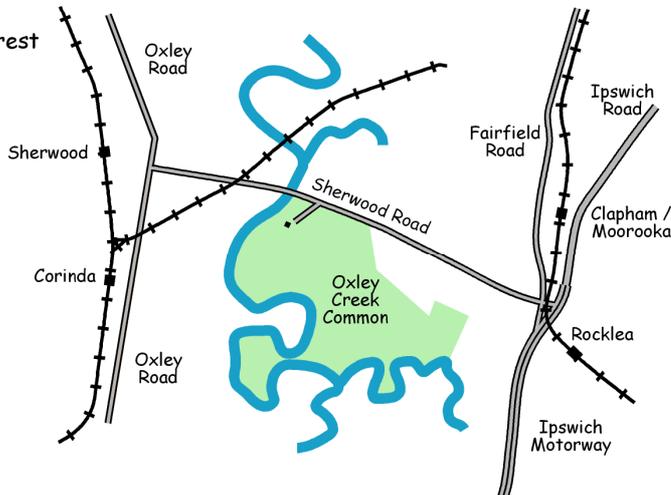
Oxley Creek Common

Birdwatchers' map Scale 1:10,000

UBD p179 20B Rocklea, Brisbane, Queensland 4106 Australia



- Public area
- Mangroves / dense forest
- Open Forest
- Lake
- Marshland
- Open scrub
- Fences
- Public, other footpath
- River, waterway
- Building
- Tree, bench
- ✦ Pylon line
- Power line
- 1 Survey areas
- 1.2 Kilometre markings



This map was created by Mark Roberts for Birds Queensland www.birdsqueensland.org.au August 2005 - January 2007 using base material from Google Earth, www.oxleycreekcommon.com.au David Niland, and some fieldwork. Its status is "good draft" and its accuracy is reasonable; please advise any updates or corrections.

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The percentages reflect the chance of seeing these species in a 100 minute visit (data from 84 visits by HP, 2004-2010). Species recorded less than 10% are not on this list. Email for full annotated list, h.possingham@uq.edu.au. The coloured arrows represent possible recent changes in abundance. Codes indicate seasonality: S (summer only), s (generally summer), W (winter only), w (generally winter).

Australian Brush-turkey		54%		Australian Warblers			
Brown Quail		55%		Superb Fairy-wren		96%	
Waterbirds				Variagated Fairy-wren		61%	
Magpie Goose		12%		Red-backed Fairy-wren		100%	
Black Swan		20%		Striated Pardalote		48%	
Australian Wood Duck		68%		White-browed Scrubwren		95%	
Pacific Black Duck		100%		Mangrove Gerygone		80%	
Grey Teal		79%		White-throated Gerygone (W)		11%	
Hardhead		35%		Yellow-rumped Thornbill		35%	
Australasian Grebe		83%		Honeyeaters			
Darter		49%		Striped Honeyeater		73%	
Little Pied Cormorant		68%		Noisy Friarbird		20%	
Little Black Cormorant		65%		Little Friarbird		60%	
Great Cormorant		15%		Blue-faced Honeyeater		77%	
Australian Pelican		55%		Noisy Miner		100%	
White-faced Heron		62%		Lewin's Honeyeater		89%	
Little Egret		14%		Brown Honeyeater (w)		100%	
Eastern Great Egret		44%		Scarlet Honeyeater		20%	
Intermediate Egret		81%		Thickheads/Flycatchers/Monarchs			
Cattle Egret		100%		Eastern Whipbird		92%	
Nankeen Night-Heron		21%		Eastern Yellow Robin		17%	
Glossy Ibis		25%		Golden Whistler (W)		26%	
Australian White Ibis		94%		Rufous Whistler (w)		49%	
Straw-necked Ibis		55%		Grey Shrike-thrush		89%	
Royal Spoonbill		33%		Magpie-lark		100%	
Buff-banded Rail		23%		Grey Fantail (W)		43%	
Purple Swamphen		96%		Willie Wagtail		100%	
Dusky Moorhen		92%		Spangled Drongo (not spring)		75%	
Eurasian Coot		58%		Others			
Latham's Snipe		26%		Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike		95%	
Black-winged Stilt		83%		Varied Triller		17%	
Black-fronted Dotterel		46%		Olive-backed Oriole		68%	
Masked Lapwing		99%		Figbird		98%	
Raptors				White-breasted Woodswallow		35%	
Black-shouldered Kite		20%		Grey Butcherbird		95%	
White-bellied Sea-Eagle		18%		Pied Butcherbird		98%	
Brown Goshawk		13%		Australian Magpie		99%	
Brown Falcon		27%		Pied Currawong		32%	
Australian Hobby		12%		Torresian Crow		100%	
Nankeen Kestrel		19%		White-throated Needletail (S)		14%	
Pigeons				Australasian Pipit		88%	
Rock Dove		65%		Double-barred Finch		94%	
Spotted Dove (I)		94%		Chestnut-breasted Mannikin		60%	
Crested Pigeon		89%		Mistletoebird (w)		94%	
Bar-shouldered Dove		99%		Welcome Swallow		90%	
Parrots				Tree Martin		71%	
Galah		65%		Fairy Martin		44%	
Little Corella		36%		Australian Reed-Warbler (s)		63%	
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo		74%		Tawny Grassbird		89%	
Rainbow Lorikeet		100%		Golden-headed Cisticola		100%	
Scaly-breasted Lorikeet		88%		Silveryeye		100%	
Pale-headed Rosella		70%		Common Starling (I)		39%	
Cuckoos and Kingfishers				Common Myna (I)		85%	
Horsefield's Bronze-Cuckoo (s)		19%					
Eastern Koel (S)		37%					
Channel-billed Cuckoo (S)		36%					
Pheasant Coucal		36%					
Laughing Kookaburra		85%					
Sacred Kingfisher (s)		49%					
Rainbow Bee-eater		27%					