

Feather Fascination!

with local Birdwatcher, Jim Butler



Black-faced Monarch: Summer Breeding Migrant

Old-World family of over 100 insectivorous songbird species with long tails; and about 20 species live in Australia. They inhabit forests or woodlands across Africa, south-east Asia,

The Black-faced Monarch (18cm) was absent during the five winters I bird-surveyed the Gap Creek Reserve. It is known that during winter these birds go north, many finding their way to Papua New Guinea (some few immature birds may winter here). Their summer breeding distribution is the whole of the east coast of Australia from Cape York to Port Phillip Bay; their winter non-breeding distribution is confined to the far north and mainly PNG. The migration pattern has been succinctly described as "Intercontinental Whole Coast" which may help you visualise the large southern flow of these birds through our Brisbane forests at this time of the year as they return south to NSW and Victoria. So right now, is an excellent time to find them in the forest trees.

The Monarch family is a recent grouping generated by DNA-DNA hybridisation studies at the end of the 20th century. They are an

Australasia and they have reached a number of Pacific islands. The Australian monarchs: magpie-lark, flycatchers, monarchs and fantails are generally arboreal, with the obvious exception of the very common magpie-larks in our parks and gardens.

The Black-faced Monarch forages for insects among foliage, or catches flying insects on the wing. Whilst foraging it moves sedately; pausing to visually scan the leaves and hopping further to get a new perspective, then pouncing or darting out at prey. Ed's photo shows prey in the broad, hooked, pale-grey bill. Prey are mostly spiders, beetles, flies and bugs. The Black-faced Monarch female builds the deep cup-nest of needles, bark, roots, moss and spider web in a tree fork. Both parents incubate the eggs and feed the young.

Go into the forest, watch a migration!

~ Jim

Image: Black-faced Monarch with prey by Ed Frazer at Brookfield

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