

# Feather Fascination!

with local Birdwatcher,

Jim Butler

**Tree Plantations and Birds**

LAST month I conducted bird surveys on selected 2 hectare plots in a large tree plantation, nine years old. In 2011, the site was cleared and seedling trees of a range of species planted. In 2020 an assessment of the biodiversity - reptiles, birds and mammals - in the plantation is being undertaken. The trees are up to 7 m tall, in close proximity, and few are in flower. No shrub layer was planted but lantana has invaded in spots. The ground is about 50% covered with weeds and leaf litter and 50% bare soil.



All bush birds are dependent on vegetation resources for food, shelter, and breeding. If the vegetation at a site cannot supply these three necessities then the birds cannot live there. Many of the bush birds live at distinct strata in the vegetation. Some find food, shelter and make nests on the ground; others in the high canopy. The possible vegetation strata are: 1. Ground layer- Leaf litter, logs, dropped fruit; 2. Ground Layer - Perennial grasses, seeds 3. Shrub layer (<2 m) 4. Mid-story layer (small trees, 6 m) 5. Canopy layer and trunks (large trees).

After 9 years this plantation only offers birds the single vegetation strata #4. This is a very narrow offering and predictably very few birds are found in the plantation at this stage. One success is the Eastern Yellow Robin. The habitat requirements for this species are: 'Mid-story layer, sparse ground cover and many vertical stems on which to perch', which is a good description of the vegetation in the surveyed plantation.

The bird surveys' sparse results are a direct outcome of planting only trees. If bird diversity was an allied aim then the planting regime would be expanded to meet the vegetation requirements of targeted bird species. If grasses (#2) and shrubs (#3) had been planted with the trees the bird survey results would be richer.

Look at vegetation structure with informed eyes.

- Jim

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Digital Bird Guide: <http://www.moggillcreek.org/> Ed Frazer at Brookfield