

Endangered bird rediscovered in Victoria

November 11 2022



Credit: La Trobe University

Although there is known to be a very small population in South Australia, the bird had not been seen or heard in Victoria for around 40 years.

The discovery was made in the Parks Victoria managed Big Desert

Wilderness Park, north of Nhill, as part of an 81-day field survey.

Lead researcher, Dr. Simon Verdon from La Trobe University, said he recognized the bird song immediately when a volunteer shared his audio with the group sitting around the campfire, a few hours after recording it.

"Both of us were very excited. I thought straight away it was the whipbird—but then I had to climb a hill to get a mobile signal and send off the audio for other experts to verify, which they did," Dr. Verdon said.

"To find that the white-bellied whipbird is not extinct in Victoria is amazing. It shows how resilient they are. There have been bad droughts and fires in this part of the world and they're still here."

Dr. Verdon said the find could benefit the species enormously.

"There's the chance now for us to act to help the species; to inform future conservation efforts and take steps to protect their habitat. Until now, there hasn't been that opportunity because we haven't known the birds were still here."

Three La Trobe researchers and seven volunteers were surveying the area for 10 rare bird species when they discovered the white-bellied whipbird.

They were halfway through their ninth and final nine-day trip when the recording was captured by 24-year-old volunteer, Lachy Wild, from Bendigo.

Dr. Verdon said the rediscovery shows how critical research and survey [field work](#) is.

"It's all about time in the field. Computer-based work is a big part of my job and it is important when managing the environment, but we need to use this type of work to boost the impact of field studies, not replace them," Dr. Verdon said.

To conduct the survey, members of the expedition were each dropped off before daybreak at isolated locations in the Big Desert Wilderness Park, where they spent eight hours at a time searching for birds.

The Big Desert Wilderness Park is one of the most inaccessible areas in Victoria, with no internal roads or walking tracks.

Dr. Verdon said the multiple-day searches can be challenging—but for "birders" the thrill of a discovery like this one, or gathering useful information to help support species survival, makes it worthwhile.

"You have to be comfortable with yourself, and believe in what you're doing, because you can get in your own head when you're walking all day, every day in the bush for over ten days," Dr. Verdon said.

"Then you stumble across a find like this, and it's a huge shock—followed by excitement and jubilation. We're just so happy to have found it."

About the project

The survey was conducted as part of the Threatened Mallee Birds project; an initiative of the Threatened Mallee Bird Conservation Action Planning Committee coordinated by BirdLife Australia, with representation from Victorian, South Australian and New South Wales government organizations, research institutes and other non-government organizations.

Data collected by the survey has increased understanding of the distribution of 10 key species included in the Commonwealth listed (endangered) Mallee bird community, and will directly inform future management efforts to protect and recover these [threatened species](#).

The [geographical area](#) known to contain these [species](#) has also been selected as one of Australia's "20 Priority Places" under the Commonwealth 2022–2032 Threatened Species Action Plan, providing a place-based focus for future research and conservation activities.

Provided by La Trobe University

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