



Gouldian Finch Study North Queensland - Update No. 12, June 2025

DRAFT



Fig 1 – Post sunset Gouldian silhouettes ($n = 7$, but spotting only 3 or 4 of them is also OK!) at a night roost in crown of an ironbark tree. See p.2 for the following sunrise shot.

Adding value

We have detected a few small range extensions this year including of apparent breeding pairs, continuing a trend of the past few years. This is tempered, however, by some previously heavily occupied areas being abandoned and staying that way to now (see also update 9, 2023). There are a few sites still to be checked this year which will add to range knowledge (see upcoming targeted surveys, p4). Despite all the threats queueing up, the population looks reasonably OK with current breeding season estimates (and past wet season flocking sites) indicating a total population of well into the hundreds.

As with last year, we have detected little divergence in Gouldian breeding chronology and feeding away from the established norm. We added a few more nest records, each located in different tree species.



Fig 2 - Male exiting nest hole – Patrick De Geest

An overnight roost

A chance evening observation of Gouldians following a woody flock at sunset led to the discovery of an overnight roost. Seven birds were nestling into the crown of an ironbark tree at 1815 h (frontispiece), and all seven were present at sunrise the next morning (Fig 3). The choice of roost in the outermost branches looks ideal at least as a means of avoiding reptile and mammalian predators. There were other Gouldian groups nearby too with about 35 Gouldians converging beneath the woodswallows soon after sunrise, and soon many other birds in the feeding association had arrived.



Fig 3 – Waking up at sunrise on their same nocturnal roost, 0655 h.

Casting the net wider

There are growing numbers of initiatives about aiming to protect country in different ways and we have been helping some of these to kick off. A couple of emerging plans with Traditional Custodians propose to look at biota values and opportunities for mainly traditional management on destocked properties. There are challenges though including balancing traditional approaches to management of country with the temptation of joining lucrative carbon programmes – the latter of course can contribute to increased woody thickening and/or catastrophic fire.

Gouldian and BFWS population trends

We got in a good monitoring round at two core properties in May-June this year, yet to be properly analysed, but superficially looks OK. One of the “carbon/no burns” properties doesn’t look so healthy though, some of it also experiencing a severe wildfire last October resulting in the loss of old growth and dead trees. All very predictable, with some areas likely to take a century before the ecosystem is recovered. Meanwhile, on a property with livestock spelling and mosaic burning, woodswallow and Gouldian encounter rates remain encouragingly high.



Fig 4 – Late afternoon in the Einasleigh Uplands.

Denizens of Hyptis

The spread of *Hyptis suaveolens* (or “Stinking Roger”) and other weeds like *Stylosanthes* has always been a worry in finch country. *Hyptis* can thrive in both grazed and ungrazed scenarios. The sticky seeds can hitch-hike on cattle, and probably macropods and birds (definitely vehicles too!) hence its ability to colonise new sites at some distance from roads and waterways. Some finches have adapted to feeding on this invasive however, including White-bellied Crimson Finches on the Mitchell Delta, where they also eat seeds of Grader Grass. To date we haven’t seen Gouldians try out these larger seeds, but one interesting development involves grasshoppers in the genus *Stenocatantops* (identified by David Rentz). During and after the wet season, these grasshoppers are attracted to *Hyptis* where they are often targeted by Black-faced Woodswallows and the smaller of the two is sometimes taken by Gouldians in the lead up to their breeding season. *Hyptis* can be controlled to manageable levels with hot fires, but I only know of one, perhaps two, managers locally who are on top of this in their fire regimes.

Upcoming targeted surveys – if interested let Ray know of your dates available.

- **July-August – most “weekends”, brief (3-4 day) surveys in Mitchell River catchment spanning known breeding areas, plus new country for survey**
- **September or October – surveys for potential capture sites.**
- **Also, 19-22 July - a general biota survey in Elizabeth Creek Gorge near Chillagoe (details on NQNHG website)**

We respectfully acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians on this country where we live and carry out our studies.

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