

Gouldian Finch Study North Queensland - Update No. 14, Aug 2026



Above – Adult male post-processing in Mitchell River catchment (photo Rhiannon Schembri).

Recent highlights

After record rainfall totals across the Einasleigh Uplands Bioregion during the Wet, it's been interesting to look at finch and woodswallow dynamics this year. Highlights have included:

- Evidence of expanded range of Gouldians in the Gilbert River catchment
- Field work completed for genetics and population health studies
- Evidence of Gouldians using weed species as food.

Gilbert catchment

In March this year rangers in the Tagalaka catchment had noticed Gouldians occurring outside the core area. We subsequently carried out a combined survey the following month and confirmed that birds had indeed occupied sites at least 10 km beyond their previously known range, with the latter area also retaining good occupancy levels. Our regular breeding season checks here since 2022 have revealed an apparently healthy trend in encounter rates of Gouldians per Black-faced Woodswallow encounter over the four years (Fig 2). The full extent of this apparent increase and expansion is unclear, however, and plans are being made for wider survey effort next year (see upcoming events).

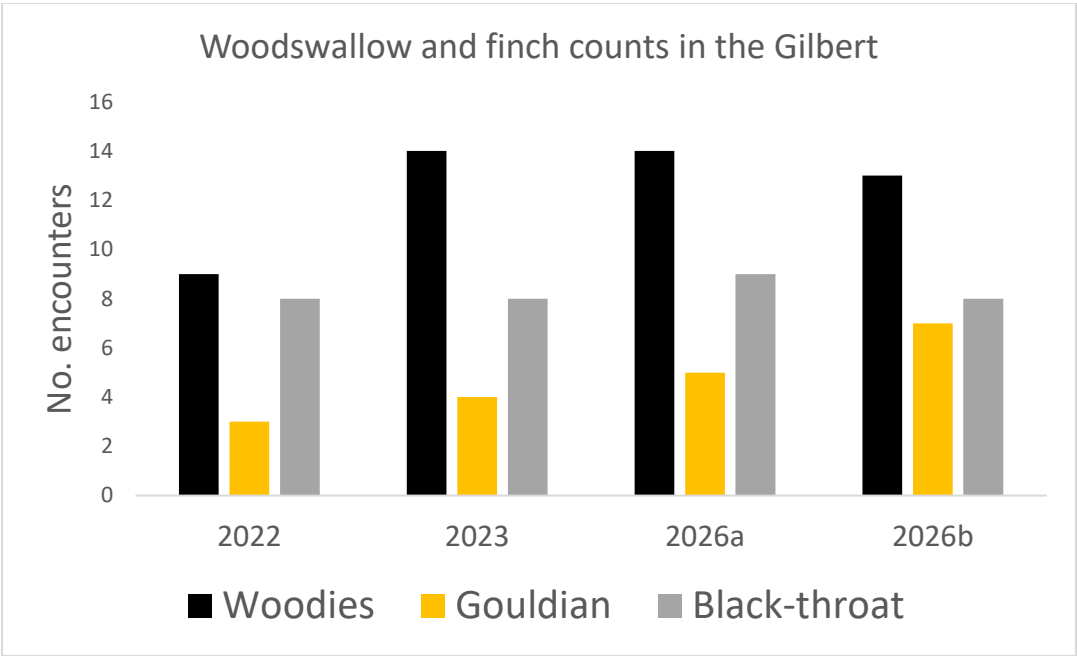


Fig 2. Encounter rates of Gouldian and Black-throated Finches in the Gilbert catchment 2022 to 2026 including one replication in 2026.



Fig 3 – Finch feeding area in a site of a recent cool burn, April 2026.

Genetics studies

Simon, Rhiannon and Martin of the Macquarie University bird genetics team visited again this August to target Gouldian and Black-throated Finches in the Mitchell catchment. A few days earlier we had located a concentration of both species in a recent fire scar and so we concentrated mist-netting efforts there at feeding and drinking sites. This proved successful and a further 37 blood samples of Gouldians were collected. The ensuing analyses at the university will help interpret genetic relationships of this subpopulation as well as its general population health.



Fig 4 – Adult and juvenile birds (above - Rhiannon Schembri) and other finches (below - Peter Bray).



Weeds!

We previously reported on woodswallows targeting *Hyptis suaveolens* stands after the Wet when this weed attracts high densities of at least two species of *Stenocatantops* grasshopper. This month, we made brief observations of juvenile Gouldians actually taking *Hyptis* seeds, the first time we have seen this weed taken by Gouldians. The three youngsters were feeding amongst, and likely learning from, many Chestnut-breasted Mannikins that were taking these seeds. *Hyptis* has a larger seed than most seeds taken by Gouldians, but it is also taken by some other finches including the White-bellied Crimson Finch, as well as most of the region's parrot and cockatoo species. At this time (August) the juvenile Gouldians are also spending a lot of the day searching for insects amongst bark of *Melaleuca viridiflora*, but grass seeds, particularly of Firegrass (*Schizachyrium fragile*) were still the staple.



Fig 3 – Juvenile Gouldians searching for insects in bark of *Melaleuca viridiflora*.

Upcoming plans

We didn't consider doing widespread surveys in the Mitchell this year as the Gouldian range looks solid and post-Wet access to some areas was challenging to say the least! However, next year we will endeavour to cover a few wider sites and potentially also cover more intensively in response to local land management changes. Masked Finches still look to be the finch most in trouble of this savannah guild.

It's a bit early to say, but targeted timeframes include:

- February 2027 – a couple of brief wet season surveys if access is OK which will include looking for banded birds at feeding concentrations. This will of course require rainfall and river levels to come to the party.

- April 2027 – breeding season surveys in the Gilbert where timing will also be dictated by access, and targeted surveys in the Mitchell including testing altitude gradients to the north.

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

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