



Gouldian Finch Study North Queensland - Update October 2020

Recently completed surveys

Lately we have covered a few more sites in the Mitchell and Gilbert catchments, including a collaborative finch and parrot survey with Northern Gulf RMG in the heart of bulldust country! A few pics below.



Above - Gouldians and Pictorellas sharing a drink – pic G. Fiinigan.



Keera and Pippy sorting out the Black Speargrass (left); darn, morning teas on the run again! (right)



Part of a flock of c.200 Pictorellas – pic G. Finnigan.

Focus on our surveyors – Grahame Finnigan

A retired Quarantine Officer at Cairns airport, former manager with Qld Dept of Natural Resources and Executive Officer with QPWS, Grahame came to the project early in 2020 and has never looked back, being a pivotal team member since then. Grahame is in fact the model surveyor, being well-versed in the outback, an astute observer with equally sharp hearing, so there's little chance that any Gouldian within earshot can escape detection. On top of that he brings his photographic skills as shown in the Pictorella shot above and Gouldian below. If you are thinking about coming out on survey you could be well advised to sidle up with him as all those survey skills will certainly rub off and in a congenial way. Grahame has been interested in Australian finches from a young age and you can see some more of his bird photos by google-searching "Grahame Finnigan Birds".



Grahame on the all important station biosecurity (above left)



A GF by GF (right)



Pairs and families of woodswallows, especially Black-faced Woodswallows (above), are great sentinels for finches

Upcoming surveys

The Gouldian-BF Woodswallow association (above) is still strong, but both these species are now grouping into fewer, large flocks meaning that Gouldian detection across the landscape is becoming a bit more hit and miss, especially in the well-watered stations. We are best to continue these presence/absence surveys after the 2021 Wet, and several stations from Palmer River to Georgetown have indicated that they are happy to host us.

So, for the coming quarter our plans are more modest:

1. Throughout October. A very few one-day surveys in the Dimbulah-Mt Mulligan area starting on site about 0630 and finishing early afternoon. Aimed at introducing new people to survey methods and following up on recent reports of Gouldians.
2. October 12-15. Campout and survey of station A to check on species associations, habitat use and feeding, and collect trail cameras that have been out in Gouldian country since May.
3. November and/or December. Opportunistic 1-3 day surveys for finches following storms and fire events and to check on foods that help Gouldians, etc. through the late Dry.
4. November onwards – cushy job reviewing rather a lot of photos on the trail cameras for dingo, cat, finch, etc questions via home computers and some data analyses.
5. Preparing some awareness material for next year.

Let me know if you are keen on any of the above and I can keep you informed of confirmed dates as field work will be weather-dependent. For reviewing camera footage, I can send through camera footage with a set of instructions, data sheets, etc.

Audio

To help with field surveys Patrick has added some Gouldian audio to the FQ website finchesqueensland.org.au

Plant ID

Finally, here are some plant teasers for you, all common plants, seeds of which are important for Gouldians - if you can identify them without going to Pam's manual etc, well done, and you might just win a trip to Station A!



1. At 2.5 m the tallest grass in Gouldian country

2. Important food in early Wet, courtesy Gary Wilson



3. A late Wet Season staple, often a sea of red seed heads



4. A Dry Season staple