

The Living Valley



Paradise Riflebird

Should you walk into the ancient rainforests of the Tweed you may be lucky enough to spot a bird with striking, iridescent emerald and black plumage shimmering in the dim light of the understory. Should that bird move through a shaft of sunlight, a radiant flash of colour may evoke from you a gasp of admiration. In the quiet you may even hear its resonant, rasping call echoing through these steadfast forests. If you are fortunate, you may see this stunning bird performing its mesmerising dance. It is *Ptiloris paradiseus* precious the Paradise Riflebird.

This species is part of a group known as the Birds of Paradise, famous for their magnificent plumage and extravagant courtship displays. This extraordinarily beautiful and unusual group of birds reaches its greatest diversity in New Guinea with 38 out of the world's 43 species occurring there. Of the four species that live in Australia, only one lives locally.

The occurrence of a Bird of Paradise this far south, isolated from all its northern relatives is best understood by peering back into time. In the ancient past, rainforests strikingly similar to those that survive in New Guinea stretched the full length of the eastern seaboard from Tasmania to our now northern neighbour.

Over millions of years, changing climate led to a massive reduction in the area of rainforest with only 1% of Australia supporting this ancient Gondwanan ecosystem. Now scattered like islands of cool green in a land of dry fire-prone eucalypts, these remnants of a time and grandeur all but past are home to this improbable and impossibly stunning bird. But still it calls from a few imperilled habitats of the Tweed and ranges.

Find the Paradise Riflebird on the Treasures of the Tweed mural.

Submitted by Rob Price, edited by EarthLearning team.

Feel free to submit ideas and observations for future Weekly articles to dom@bewilderness.org or ring 02 66791439