

The Living Valley



Eastern Bristlebird and Rufous Scrub-bird

Such melodious birdsong burst forth from the macadamia tree. A band of small brown birds were whistling and clicking joyfully. My bird book revealed the possibility of two similar shy brown birds facing extinction in the Tweed Valley, with only isolated pockets of their particular habitats remaining due to fire and over-zealous clearing.

The Eastern Bristlebird *Dasyornis brachypterus* now lives in the eucalypt forests and native grasses growing on high ridges and mountains sides of the Tweed caldera. The Rufous Scrub-bird *Atrichornis rufescens* prefers cooler mountain rainforest especially those with ancient Antarctic Beech trees. Scrub birds, along with the more flamboyant Lyrebirds, come from a Gondwanan lineage that are ancestors to most other living songbirds.

Both birds live close to the ground, foraging amongst the leaf litter, mosses and logs feasting on insects and small fruits & seeds but vulnerable to feral cat and fox predation. Living on the dryer slopes, the Eastern Bristlebird is particularly exposed to fire during its July-August nesting season.

To make the endangered list means if threats are not reduced, the species is destined for extinction. The decline of these two shy and mysterious bird species from the Tweed and South East Queensland has been observed over the last decade and concern for their survival is growing.

The clicking call of the birds in the macadamia suggests they were the widespread Rufous Songlark (*Cinchorhamphus mathewsi*) but if we take care to retain rainforest and eucalypt habitat the melodic songs of the Rufous Scrub-bird and the Eastern Bristlebird will be heard by our children and their children. Look for these birds on the Treasures of the Tweed mural, Commercial Road, Murwillumbah.

Submitted by Earth Learning, a local community group which encourages your participation and interest in the planet and its living things. 02 66791439.