Eastern Bristlebird

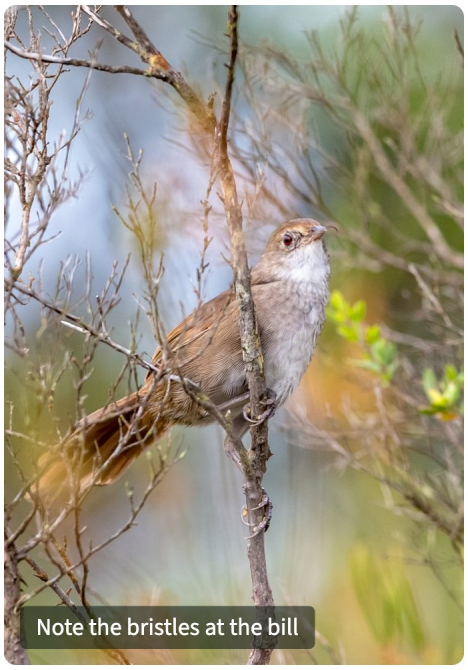
Dasyornis brachypterus

Endangered in NSW

Endangered nationally



Photos © Peter Rowland



Note the bristles at the bill

SIZE
About 21 cm, with a long tail

HOME
Dense coastal heath and scrub

FOOD
Ants and other insects, found on the ground

LOCAL BIRDS
About 1,600 in the Illawarra and Jervis Bay

Our local stronghold

Only a few small populations of Eastern Bristlebirds are left in Australia. The largest is right here, at Barren Grounds and Budderoo above the Illawarra, and around Jervis Bay. Far fewer live near the Victorian border, and fewer than 40 were counted in the northern population.

The climate connection

Bristlebirds hide in thick, low heath. Big, hot fires strip that cover away, leaving them exposed to foxes and cats. Hotter, drier summers bring more large fires. In 2019–20 the only Victorian population came close to being wiped out. Patchy fires that leave unburnt refuges help them recover.

Hear it before you see it

Bristlebirds are shy and rarely fly. They feed on the ground and run through the bushes like mice, often darting across a walking track. They are easier to hear than see: listen for a loud, rhythmic call from deep in the heath, especially early in the morning. Stiff bristles at the base of the bill give the bird its name.

WONDER QUESTION

How could a bird that hardly flies get to the other side of Jervis Bay?

Turn over for teacher notes

Teacher notes

Curriculum links (new NSW syllabuses, 2026 to 2027)

Stage	Outcome	Where the Bristlebird fits
Early Stage 1	STe-SCI-01 (S&T K–6)	Living things need shelter: why a small bird hides in thick bushes
Stage 2	ST2-SCI-01 (S&T K–6)	Habitat: dense heath for food, nests and hiding; ant to bristlebird to fox
Stage 3	ST3-SCI-01 (S&T K–6)	Adaptations: camouflage, running, bill bristles; managing fire carefully
Stage 4 (Year 8)	SC4-LIV-01 Living systems	Interactions: predation by foxes and cats; fire and recovery
Stage 5 (Year 9)	SC5-ENV-01 Environmental sustainability	Effects of climate change on ecosystems: larger, more frequent fires
Year 11 to 12	BI-12-03 Biology 11–12	Translocation and genetic diversity; judging a recovery program

In the classroom

K–2

Hide and seek

Hide brown and brightly coloured paper birds in a garden bed. Which are found first? Why is a brown bird in thick bushes hard for a fox to spot?

YEARS 3–6

Sound map

Sit quietly outside for five minutes and mark every sound on a map. Then listen to a bristlebird call, and talk about why scientists count shy birds by ear.

YEARS 7–12

Moving birds

Fifty birds moved across Jervis Bay in 2003–05 grew to 94 in seven years. Fifty moved from Barren Grounds to Cataract in 2008 reached only 15. Why the difference?

Get outside

Walk Barren Grounds Nature Reserve, or Murrays Loop in Booderee National Park, early in the morning. Stay on the track, listen for the call, and watch for a brown bird running across.

First Nations perspectives

Through your local AECG or Land Council, invite knowledge holders to share how heathland birds and fire are understood on Dharawal or Yuin Country. Booderee is jointly managed with the Wreck Bay Aboriginal Community. *[Local story, added with permission]*

Hope and action

After 20 years of fox control, record numbers of bristlebirds live at Booderee, and Jervis Bay birds have been moved to start a new population at Wilsons Promontory. Small things students and schools can do:

- Keep pet cats inside
- Keep dogs out of national parks
- Stay on walking tracks in heathland
- Learn the call and share it

Talking tip: lead with wonder and action rather than loss. A bird once in deep trouble is now so common at Jervis Bay that it is helping to save others.

Scan for the full fact sheet: prpw.com.au/project/eastern-bristlebird

Words and photos: Peter Rowland · *Wonder through nature* · Version 1.0, November 2026

Sources: McNab, The Guide to Victorian Wildlife (2024); NSW BioNet threatened species profile; NSW NPWS Saving our Species; Parks Australia (Booderee); Baker et al. 2012, Ecological Management & Restoration; National Recovery Plan. Check curriculum links at curriculum.nsw.edu.au.