Swift Parrot

Lathamus discolor

Endangered in NSW

Critically endangered nationally



Photos © Peter Rowland



Upside down to feed

SIZE
About 25 cm, slim with a long red tail

BREEDS
Only in Tasmania, in hollows of old trees

FOOD
Eucalypt nectar and lerps (sugary insect covers)

IN THE WILD
Probably fewer than 1,000; estimates vary

A winter visitor

Each autumn Swift Parrots fly across Bass Strait from Tasmania. On the mainland they follow winter-flowering trees such as Spotted Gum, Swamp Mahogany and Red Bloodwood, and some years they visit the Illawarra. The South Coast from Ulladulla to Merimbula is an Important Bird Area for them.

The climate connection

Swift Parrots need trees flowering in the right place at the right time. When drought stopped flowering in Victoria, the birds flew more than 1,000 km further north to find food in NSW. Scientists predict almost a quarter of their Tasmanian nesting habitat could become unsuitable as the climate changes.

Built for speed

Swift Parrots are among the fastest parrots in the world, and fly thousands of kilometres each year. Their brush-tipped tongues lap up nectar, and they hang upside down to reach blossom and lerps. In the canopy they keep up a constant, high-pitched chatter.

Scan to watch one feed

WONDER QUESTION

How does a parrot in Tasmania know where the flowers will be this winter?

Turn over for teacher notes

Teacher notes

Curriculum links (new NSW syllabuses, 2026 to 2027)

Stage	Outcome	Where the parrot fits
Early Stage 1	STe-SCI-01 (S&T K–6)	How living things get air, water and energy to survive
Stage 2	ST2-SCI-01 (S&T K–6)	Habitat and ecosystem; food chains from blossom to parrot
Stage 3	ST3-SCI-01 (S&T K–6)	Adaptations: migration, speed, brush-tipped tongue; sustainable practices
Stage 4 (Year 8)	SC4-LIV-01 Living systems	Interactions in ecosystems: predation, competition and pollination
Stage 5 (Year 9)	SC5-ENV-01 Environmental sustainability	Effects of climate change on ecosystems: drought shifts where birds can feed
Year 11 to 12	BI-12-03 Biology 11–12	Biodiversity conservation across a migratory range; weighing threats

In the classroom

K–2

The big trip

On a large map, trace the parrot's journey from Tasmania, across Bass Strait, to your school. Count the "flaps" to cross the classroom, then talk about how far the real birds fly, and why.

YEARS 3–6

Window detectives

Fast-flying birds can hit windows and fences. Survey the school for glass a bird might not see, then design and test stickers or patterns that make windows visible to birds.

YEARS 7–12

Weighing the evidence

Scientists disagree on whether logging or introduced sugar gliders is the bigger threat to nesting parrots in Tasmania. Students read both sides and argue which actions would help most.

Get outside

In winter, check flowering Spotted Gum and Swamp Mahogany for small, fast flocks of chattering parrots. Join BirdLife Australia's Swift Parrot search and report any sightings to BirdLife.

First Nations perspectives

Through your local AECG or Land Council, invite knowledge holders to share how seasonal flowering and bird movements are understood on Dharawal or Yuin Country. *[Local story, added with permission]*

Hope and action

Communities are planting thousands of winter-flowering trees for Swift Parrots, including more than 6,600 in one NSW project, and researchers in Tasmania are testing nest boxes that keep sugar gliders out. Small things students and schools can do:

- Plant local winter-flowering eucalypts
- Make windows bird-safe with decals
- Keep pet cats inside
- Report any Swift Parrot sighting to BirdLife

Talking tip: lead with wonder and action rather than loss. A tree planted at school today could feed Swift Parrots for decades.

Scan for the full fact sheet and video: prpw.com.au/project/swift-parrot

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

Sources: McNab, The Guide to Victorian Wildlife (2024); BirdLife Australia; NSW BioNet threatened species profile; Saunders et al. 2016 and Porfirio et al. 2016, Emu; Australian National University; Local Land Services. Check curriculum links at curriculum.nsw.edu.au.