



The Avicultural Society of New South Wales (ASNSW)

(Founding in 1940 as the Parrot & African Lovebird Society of Australia)

PO Box 248, Panania NSW 2213, Australia

Lord Howe Island Woodhen and Currawong

(ASNSW Meeting - May 2013)



Lord Howe Island ([Photo courtesy of Wikipedia Commons](#))

The first reported sighting of Lord Howe Island (600 kilometres east of Port Macquarie on the eastern coast of mainland Australia) was by Lt Ball on the 17th February 1788 whilst on route to establish a penal settlement on Norfolk Island.

The island is 10 kilometres in length, ranging in width from only 2.0 to 0.3 kilometres with a coral reef lagoon running along the western side. Mount Gower covers the southern end of the Island and is the highest peak at 875 metres.

Lord Howe Island today is a world heritage listed area with its population and tourism limited.

Lord Howe Island Woodhen

In 1837 the Woodhens were plentiful on the island and an easy and tasty food source forming the main food for the island's growing population. The demise of the Woodhen was rapid.

In 1853 (only 16 years later), J D McDonald from the exploration ship, the HMS Herald, couldn't find any.

Populations of feral cats and pigs on the island (introduced by the island's first settlers) found the Woodhen easy prey adding to its further demise. Woodhens survived on the summits where they were out of the reach of the pigs but their decline continued with a population count at one stage of only about 20+ birds.



Lord Howe Island Woodhen
([Photo courtesy of Wikipedia](#))

Woodhens are territorial. A mated pair will defend an area of approximately 3 hectares, with the young being expelled from this area when they are fully grown.

Recovery Programme

- Feral pigs and cats, whilst a major threat, were in low enough numbers that they were able to be completely removed from the island.
- A captive breeding programme was set up in 1980 with three pairs of the Lord Howe Island Woodhen being brought in from Mount Gower. Eggs were laid within a few weeks and were incubated for the last week of development. By late 1980 50 chicks had been hatched.

- In May 1981 two pairs were released and confirmed healthy in August 1981.
- By January 1984 93 birds were released and the breeding centre was closed.
- Today there are about 220 Woodhens on the island.



Lord Howe Island Currawong
([Photo courtesy of Wikipedia](#))

Lord Howe Island Currawong

Similar to other subspecies of the Pied Currawong - generally a black bird with yellow eyes, white on the wing, undertail coverts, the base of the tail and tip of the tail.

Compared with the nominate subspecies of eastern Australia it has a longer and more slender bill, less white on the wings and tail, and a paler iris.

The Lord Howe Island Currawong is the only predator left on the island – only about 80 birds in 2000.

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