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An update from the Black-throated Finch Recovery Team.

The Birds Australia Congress held in Townsville in 2010 included a series of papers on the ecology and conservation issues of *Poephila cincta cincta* (BTF) and the efforts of the Black-throated Finch Recovery Team (BTFRT) continue to focus on the Townsville region. While other populations of BTF are obviously important, the population on the Townsville coastal plain is the one that is best known, most accessible and, probably most at risk in the short to medium term.

The BTFRT held its annual waterhole count in October 2010. That count yielded very low numbers of birds even though coverage of waterholes was similar to that of preceding years. The explanation lies in the fact that there were very early rains (in September and October) disrupting the usual pattern in which birds are concentrated around relatively few watering points. The 2010-2011 wet season was a big one and included Cyclone Yasi. The BTFRT is yet to consider the effect of that major weather event.

The Townsville population of the black-throated finch continues to come under the pressures of urbanisation. Significant areas of habitat are threatened by the expanding urban footprint of northern Australia's largest city. This includes extensive areas of new suburbs as well as rural residential developments. Habitat-modelling currently being undertaken is attempting to identify critical habitat and hopefully better inform decision-makers. The BTFRT attempts to respond constructively to relevant development proposals and engages with local, state and commonwealth authorities where appropriate. Better knowledge of where birds are and how they use the increasingly fragmented landscape is critical and a strategic approach to habitat retention rather than piecemeal responses to development proposals is the ideal.

Approval of a major urban development on Townsville's northern outskirts was accompanied by the formation of a Trust fund negotiated with the then Commonwealth Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts. The BTFRT is represented on a committee whose task is to decide how funds are to be expended, the North Queensland Dry Tropics NRM being the Trustee. In late 2010, the Trust committee negotiated to fund several important projects. These include projects to:

- (i) develop management guidelines to maintain and restore BTF habitat
- (ii) estimate the population of BTF on the Townsville coastal plain;
- (iii) devise a plan sympathetic to the conservation of BTF on the Lake Ross storage area in collaboration with the authorities responsible for that land;
- (iv) conduct critical research on BTF through a PhD and other projects supervised and co-funded jointly by James Cook University and CSIRO;
- (v) promote the management of BTF habitat on private land;
- (vi) educate stakeholders and the general public about BTF, its habitat and conservation needs.

These projects will be underway in early 2011.



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The BTFRT seeks to increase its effectiveness in contributing to the conservation of the BTF. Better knowledge of populations away from the Townsville region is very important. Current indications are that *Poephila cincta cincta* has been lost in New South Wales and is probably extinct in Queensland south of Rockhampton. It would be tragic if the loss of remaining populations took the BTF the way of the southern race of the Star Finch (*Neochmia ruficauda ruficauda*).

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