



**ILLAWARRA
BIRDERS**

ILLAWARRA BIRDERS Inc.
PO Box 1355 Wollongong NSW 2500
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Illawarra Birders appreciate the opportunity to comment on the Draft Illawarra Mountain Bike Strategy

Illawarra Birders Inc. **strongly object** the draft Illawarra Mountain Bike Strategy

Illawarra Birders are a group with over 100 members based in the Illawarra Region on the Southern Coast of NSW. Our club has a strong focus on conservation issues and we are proud to fundraise and donate money to conservation projects as well as to consistently gather bird data with our regular survey work in the Illawarra area.

Impacts of the Mountain Bike Strategy on Wildlife

These are our objections relating to wildlife:

- National Parks and Wildlife are backing this proposal which contravenes it's most important role 'To **preserve** and **protect** wildlife'. The area concerned is a State Conservation Zone.
- The front cover of the strategy states that it is a joint proposal from Wollongong Council and National Parks. We have a major issue with this as National Parks and Wildlife Service have CLEARLY STATED they do not have the man-power to police trails that are existing and know that lots of illegal activities such as mountain biking – which the mountain bikers clearly acknowledge - and motor bike riding are consistently occurring especially at Mount Keira.
- Illawarra Birders are very concerned at the impacts these current, unrestricted and unpoliced activities have on wildlife on the escarpment.
- We are also concerned that the draft strategy states "*Future development of the trails may warrant investigation of opportunities on other land.*" This indicates that these trails are just the beginning!
- Many small species of birds and other wildlife can be negatively impacted by changes to vegetation structure that happens when bushland is disturbed close to them. Cutting of new trails also allows the introduction of greater numbers of predators which gain easier access to bushland areas when trails are created.
- Impacts cause Stress/ Disturbance to wildlife - A relatively fast moving, quiet mountain biker may approach an animal without being detected until well within the normal 'flight response zone'. This is particularly an issue for wildlife, especially if there is any background noise such as wind or water from a creek, as bikes have the potential to approach to a close distance before they are noticed. Startled wildlife and birds can injure themselves as they take flight to move quickly away. They may desert young and may potentially not return.



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- Some animals are known to change their behaviour when their habitat is disturbed. Such behaviour changes can include physical changes such as loss of weight or condition, changes in eating patterns or what is eaten and moving to new, possibly less desirable, habitat.
- With increased human disturbance birds also spend increased amounts of time when they are on the alert and can be seen to be consistently scanning and watching the areas around them noted as *“increased vigilance, freezing (anti-predator behaviour) and less time grooming and sleeping (Estaban et al.2007).* This can adversely impact their condition and we worry that it may affect their breeding and lifespan due to increased stress.
- There is also potential for impacts and injuries to both wildlife species and mountain bikers caused by collisions of bikes with wildlife.
- Another major issue is related to the alteration of habitat. Wildlife habitat is something that remains a puzzle as sometimes what appears to be identical habit in two separate areas will see a certain species present in one area and absent in another. Wildlife habitat is a fragile thing and it is vital we leave some areas pristine for continued survival of many of our unique Australian species.
- There are many species of birds which are ground dwelling in the areas proposed for the tracks such as Logrunner (at the southern-most limits of it’s range), Noisy Pitta (which is known to breed at Mt Keira and is a rare bird for the Illawarra Region), Brush Turkey, Superb Lyrebird and Bassian Thrush. ALL of these bird species would be impacted by the increased human traffic.
- While some species of birds can put up with with continued human disturbance many others are totally or partly intolerant to human impacts.
- The study of Fauna of the Illawarra Escarpment Bioregional Assessment Part II 2002 states that some species of fauna are found only along the Wollongong escarpment – *“ the rainforests and moist eucalypt forests of the escarpment are high quality habitat for the Sooty Owl, Stuttering Frog, Australian Brush Turkey, Logrunner, Grey-headed Flying Fox and Highland’s Forest Skink”.*
- Sooty Owl and other owl species are known to use the escarpment (Powerful, Southern Boobook) and other night-active birds such as Frogmouths and Nightjars roost in the forests during the day and therefore have the potential to be severely impacted as bikers would be more active in the forests during the day when these species are more likely to be disturbed.



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- If flushed these birds can then be attacked by other birds or wildlife who view them as potential threats or food – they can also become disoriented and stray onto roads or desert their most desirable habitat.
- The area in question is a part of a vital section of the green/ wildlife corridor. The Illawarra Escarpment links the Royal National Park to the Shoalhaven.
- The draft strategy recognises the escarpment is *“a refuge for the regions unique biodiversity including rare species and plant communities, and species that are reliant on it’s natural habitats”* yet this proposal asks to carve up this area with a myriad of trails. There is substantial evidence that trails can act as a barrier to the movement of animals and would impact ground-dwelling bird species. Wildlife is known to exhibit ‘behavioural avoidance’ (Donaldson and Bennett 2004) when there is a physical barrier present which can impact their natural behaviour.
- The strategy causes much greater habitat fragmentation for wildlife by the very nature of the zig-zagging nature of the trails to be constructed.
- Illawarra Birders would prefer to see illegal trails closed and NO NEW trails developed throughout the escarpment forests. To us this area should be zoned for conservation and no-one, including walkers should be allowed to access the conservation zones.
- We are also concerned about things such as pollution from rubbish, weeds introduced when trails are cleared, and from the humans that use these tracks – toilet facilities?? All of these pollutants can also impact wildlife.
- Wildlife does not have a voice – the birds and other fauna species that LIVE in the escarpment forests and rainforests cannot speak out. This area is unique and precious to us. We are already seeing a great reduction in numbers of many bird species across our region and do not wish to see our precious wildlife dwindle to something we tell our children that we *‘used to be able to see!’*.

Illawarra Birders are so concerned about this proposal that numerous members have contributed information to us for our submission/s. Illawarra Birders Inc. will therefore submit separate submissions relating to several areas we are concerned about. This submission deals only with impacts to wildlife.

Yours Sincerely
Michelle Rower
Conservation Officer
Illawarra Birders Inc.