

Threatened Species of the Northern Territory

GREATER SAND PLOVER

Charadrius leschenaultii

Conservation status

Australia: Vulnerable

Northern Territory: Vulnerable



Photo: J. Barkla

Description

The Greater Sand Plover is a small-to-medium-sized shorebird with a straight longish bill that bulges towards the end but has a pointed tip. The legs are long and olive-grey. In non-breeding plumage (typical of Australian visitors) the head, nape and upperparts are grey-brown and there are large grey-brown patches on the sides of the breast. The forehead and eyebrow are white, as are the chin, neck and underparts. Males in breeding plumage have a chestnut breast-band, the head and nape are tinged with rufous and there is black on the face.

Distribution

The Greater Sand Plover breeds across a large arc of central Asia, from Turkey to Mongolia. Only one of three recognised subspecies migrates to Australia (*C. l. leschenaultii*) and this subspecies breeds in China, Mongolia and nearby parts of Russia (Garnett al. 2011). Birds of this subspecies migrate south along the East Asian-Australasian flyway, overwintering in East Asia, South-East Asia and Australasia.

Their distribution in Australia during the non-breeding season is quite widespread, but the majority are found in northern Australia

(Garnett et al. 2011). In the non-breeding season the majority settle on the northern coasts, but they can be found along all Australian coasts.

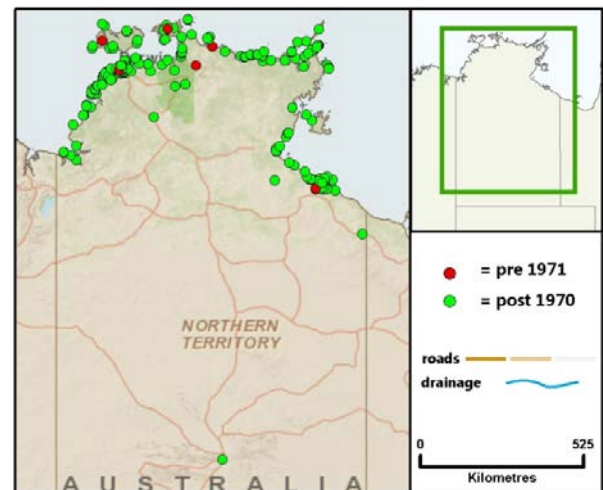


Figure 1 - Known locations of the Greater Sand Plover

In the Northern Territory (NT), Greater Sand Plovers have been recorded from most of the coastline. The most significant areas for the species identified by Chatto (2003) were Joseph Bonaparte Gulf, the coast from Anson Bay to Murgellen Creek (including the south coast of the Tiwi Islands), the northern Arnhem coast, and the Port McArthur area. There is a small number of inland records from the Alice Springs region, presumably of transiting migratory birds.

Conservation reserves where reported: Barranyi National Park, Casuarina Coastal Reserve, Charles Darwin National Park, Djukbinj National Park, Kakadu National Park and Limmen National Park.

Ecology

After the breeding in the northern summer on the stony plains of the Gobi Desert, those that overwinter in Australia migrate southwards along the East Asian-Australasian flyway. These non-breeding birds forage along sandy beaches and sheltered mudflats (Geering et al. 2011). Chatto (2003) reported them occasionally also using inland saline wetlands but always close to the coast. They feed on molluscs, marine worms and crustaceans. Greater Sand Plovers are gregarious, often in small to large flocks and often intermingled with other shorebirds such as Lesser Sand Plovers.

Conservation assessment

The status of this species globally and in Australia was reviewed in 2010 (by Birdlife International (2011), and Garnett et al. (2011), respectively). Globally, Birdlife International (2011) considers the species to be numerous, and the population trend unknown. However, many years of counts at key sites across Australia, particularly at Broome (north-west Western Australia; Rogers et al. 2010) indicate that, for the subspecies that migrates to Australia, there has been a recent decline of >30 percent (though counts may have stabilised in Morton Bay, Queensland.). On the basis of this observed decline in numbers visiting Australia, Garnett et al. (2011) rated its Australian status as Vulnerable.

Birds occurring in the NT are a component of the migratory Australian population, and can reasonably be assumed to have suffered a reduction of similar proportion. As a consequence, this species qualifies as **Vulnerable** in the NT (under criterion A2a), based on:

- population reduction of >30 percent over three generations (c. 22 years) observed in the past; and
- where the causes of reduction have not ceased and may not be reversible.

Threatening processes

The main acute cause of population decline for birds migrating to Australia is habitat loss at migratory stop-over grounds (mudflats in the Yellow Sea area: Barter 2002; Moores et al. 2008; Hassell 2010), but habitat degradation has also occurred more gradually across most of its range.

The non-breeding grounds of the species in south-eastern Australia are threatened by habitat degradation, loss and human disturbance (Garnett et al. 2011), but those in the north are generally free of such disturbances.

Conservation objectives and management

In the NT, the primary conservation objective is to maintain stable non-breeding populations by retaining healthy intertidal mudflat habitats.

Secondarily, the Australian Government should be supported in its international endeavours to promote conservation of shorebirds along the East Asian-Australasian flyway.

Complied by

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