

Threatened Species of the Northern Territory

PLAINS-WANDERER

Pedionomus torquatus

Conservation status

Australia: Critically Endangered

Northern Territory: Data Deficient



Photo: J. B Mullins

Description

The Plains-wanderer is a small, quail-like terrestrial bird. Compared with quail, it is more slender, has a finer bill and far longer legs. The sexes differ in plumage. The upperparts are generally mottled brown, paler with black crescents on the undersides. The female has a conspicuous white-spotted black collar and rufous breast.

Distribution

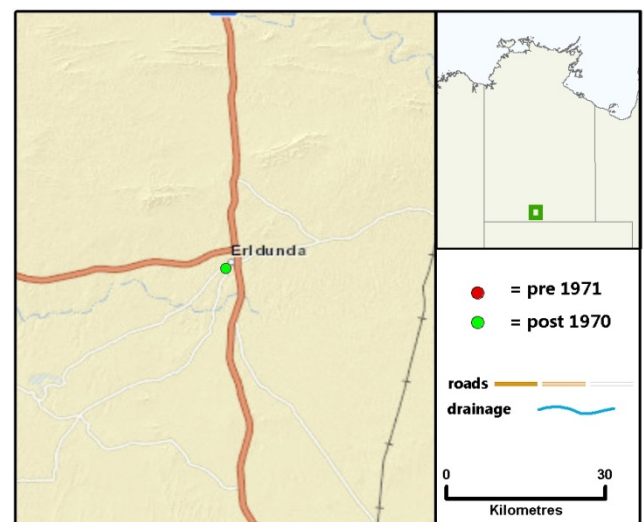
The plains-wanderer is known from sparse grasslands and open areas, mostly in southeastern Australia (especially the Riverina), with some more isolated records in South Australia and inland Queensland. There are no confirmed records from the NT, but Bennett (1983) reported probable records from Eridunda Station, 180 km south of Alice Springs.

Conservation reserves where reported:

None.

Ecology

The plains-wanderer is an entirely terrestrial species. Its diet comprises seeds and invertebrates. It is usually observed walking



Possible location of the Plains-wanderer in the NT

alone, in pairs or family parties, often stopping and standing upright with neck craned. Once alarmed, they either flatten and merge with their grassland surrounds, or run away quickly; they rarely take flight (Bennett 1983). The nest is a scrape on the ground, and breeding may be aseasonal and opportunistic.

The male plains-wanderer takes the major role in incubating and caring for the young. The preferred habitat is sparse low grasslands, typically with c.50% bare ground and most vegetation less than 5cm in height.

Conservation assessment

There are no confirmed records, and few possible records, from the NT. At best the NT is marginal for the geographic range and conservation status for this species. In the NT, it is best treated as **Data Deficient**.

Threatening processes

In its core range (outside the NT), the main threat is clearance and conversion of native grasslands to crops (Garnett and Crowley 2000). Over-grazing, particularly during droughts, may reduce habitat quality and render the species more vulnerable to predation (especially by foxes) (Baker-Gabb *et al.* 1990). Chemicals used to control plague locusts may kill plains-wanderers directly or indirectly (Garnett and Crowley 2000). European foxes and feral cats are potential predators of plains-wanderers (Baker-Gabb 2002)

Conservation objectives and management

In the NT, the research and management priority is to more systematically assess its status, including distribution, abundance, habitat requirements and threats. However, given its probable at best marginal occurrence in the NT, actions for this species are not considered a high priority.

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References

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management of the plains-wanderer *Pedionomus torquatus*. *Emu* **90**, 161-168.

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