Threatened Species of the Northern Territory

PAINTED HONEYEATER
Grantiella picta

Conservation status
Australia: Vulnerable
Northern Territory: Vulnerable

Description
The Painted Honeyeater is a small to medium-sized honeyeater in which the black head and upperparts contrast strongly with the white underparts. There are patches of bright yellow in the wings and bordering the tail, and brown black streaks on the side of the neck and on the flanks. The bill is pink with a brown tip and is relatively robust.

Distribution
The Painted Honeyeater has a broad distribution in eastern Australia, but is nowhere very numerous. Most breeding occurs in the inland slopes of south-eastern Australia, and non-breeding birds move widely out into semi-arid and northern regions.

There are few records of this species in the Northern Territory (NT), most coming from the Barkly Tablelands. There is no evidence of a breeding population in the Territory and the records are thought to be of irregular visitors from the south-east (though it is possibly a regular visitor in small numbers).

Conservation reserves where reported:
None.

Ecology
Painted Honeyeaters are the most specialised honeyeaters, being almost wholly dependent on mistletoe fruits, but may also feed on nectar and insects. They inhabit (Acacia- or Eucalyptus-dominated) woodlands and open forest and prefer habitats with more mature trees since these host more mistletoes. Breeding times and seasonal movements (south-north) are thought to be governed by the fruiting of mistletoe (Garnett et al. 2011).
Nearly all records of the species in the NT are between May and August (mostly June to July, and there is one record in December 1979) (Higgins et al. 2001).

Conservation assessment

Recent evidence (in Garnett et al. 2011) suggests that the species has declined significantly across its core range in eastern and south-eastern Australia (probably associated with habitat clearance and fragmentation, exacerbated by drought), and that the total population size is small. Garnett et al. (2011) estimate a total population size of <10 000 breeding birds, contained all within one sub-population. This population is expected to decline by 10-25 per cent over the next three generations (c. 18 years).

There are no data on trends in the NT, but it is prudent to assume that population trends in the Territory are contingent on and consistent with national trends. Consequently, this species qualifies as Vulnerable in the NT (under criterion C2a(ii)), based on:

- A small total population size 2 500 - 10 000; and
- 100 per cent in one sub population.

Threatening processes

The main acute cause of population decline for the Painted Honeyeater is habitat loss and degradation in eastern and south-eastern Australia. Garnett et al. (2011) cite clearing of Brigalow woodland in Queensland, other clearing in New South Wales and land degradation by over-grazing by livestock, native macropods and rabbits as important examples. The areas of the NT visited by the species are generally free of such disturbances.

Conservation objectives and management

In the NT, the primary conservation objective is to maintain healthy Acacia and Eucalypt woodlands with old-growth that can sustain healthy mistletoe populations.

Management objective include to more accurately define the numbers visiting the NT, their distribution and preferred habitats here. Programs to monitor numbers should also be developed and implemented.

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References

*BirdLife Australia www.birdlife.org.au


* BirdLife Australia www.birdlife.org.au
