

# Threatened Species of the Northern Territory

## GREY CURRAWONG

### (western subspecies)

### *Strepera versicolor plumbea*

#### Conservation status

Australia: Not listed

Northern Territory: Critically Endangered



Grey currawong (Photo: Graeme Chapman).

#### Description

The western subspecies of the grey currawong is a large bird (head-body length up to 50 cm). As its name suggests, it is predominantly dark in colour. Most of the upper and underbody is smoky-grey with a brownish tinge. The face and throat has a sooty wash. A large white patch is present on the wings and extends from the base of the primary flight feathers to the outer secondary flight feathers. The tips of both primary and secondary flight feathers are white.

The dark tail has a broad white band at its tip. The bill and legs are black. The eye is bright yellow. Sexes are similar in size and appearance.

Five other subspecies of the grey currawong occur in Australia and these vary both in colour (from grey to brown to almost black) and size.

#### Distribution

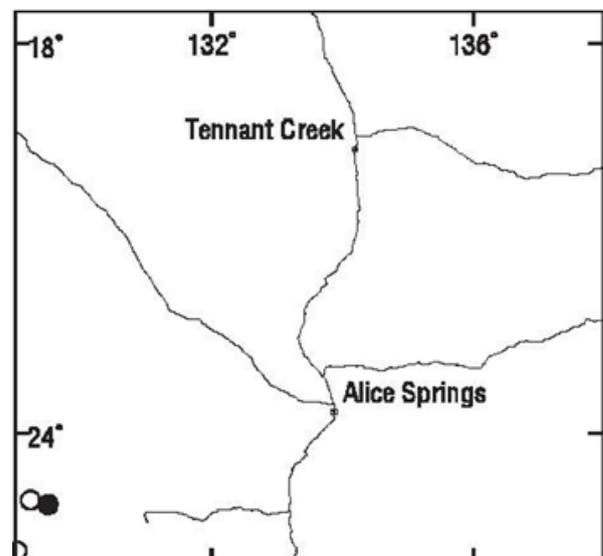
The grey currawong is endemic to Australia and occurs as six subspecies in the southern half of the continent.

The distribution ranges from just north of Sydney, south through Victoria,

southern South Australia and south-west Western Australia. It also occurs in eastern Tasmania. The range of subspecies *plumbea* extends from south-west Western Australia across into north-west South Australia and into the south-west corner of the Northern Territory. It has been recorded north to the Petermann Ranges and east to 35 km west of Victory Downs.

Conservation reserves where reported:

None.



Known locations of the grey currawong

□ = pre 1970; • = post 1970

## Ecology

Relatively little is known about the ecology of the grey currawong and although widespread, it is generally not common. Usually single birds or pairs are observed, although historical accounts indicate that large flocks formed. The species has a distinctive loud ringing call that draws attention to its presence. It is a carnivore that feeds mostly on insects that are obtained within the leaf litter or while foraging on tree trunks.

## Threatened Species Information Sheet

The species occupies a range of woodlands and forests. In the Northern Territory, it has been reported from patches of tall acacia and river red gum woodland in the foothills of the central ranges (Storr 1977).

The breeding season is from July to November. Two or three oval eggs are laid in a cup-shaped nest located on a tree branch.

Conservation assessment Although Storr (1977) considered that the grey currawong still occurred in the Northern Territory, it appears that the last definite sightings were obtained in the 1960s (Reid and Fleming 1992).

The subspecies is of conservation concern throughout its range (Schodde and Mason 1999).

Due to the absence of suitable surveys, it is not appropriate to classify the grey currawong as extinct in the Northern Territory. Therefore, it is classified as Critically Endangered (under criterion D) due to:

- a population size estimated to number fewer than 50 mature individuals.

## Threatening processes

The cause(s) of the decline of the grey currawong in the Northern Territory is unknown. However, it is likely that the individuals that exist(ed) in the Territory belong to a relict population that occupies small refuges of suitable habitat. The decline of these individuals may be the result of natural processes associated with retraction of suitable habitat or alternatively, result from habitat degradation. Given that the grey

currawong spends considerable time foraging on the ground, it is also possible that they suffer predation by introduced carnivores.

## Conservation objectives and management

There is no existing management program for this species in the Northern Territory.

Research priorities are to:

- (i) follow-up any potential sightings of the species; and
- (ii) when possible, to carry out a survey for the species within its range in the Northern Territory.

## Compiled by

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## References

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Schodde, R., and Tidemann, S.C. (eds) (1986). *Reader's Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds.* 2nd edition. (Reader's Digest, Sydney.)

Storr, G.M. (1977). *Birds of the Northern Territory.* (Western Australian Museum, Perth.)