

# Threatened species of the Northern Territory

## Princess parrot

*Polytelis alexandrae*

### Conservation status

#### Australia: Vulnerable

Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999

#### Northern Territory: Vulnerable

Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1976



Credit: S. Murphy

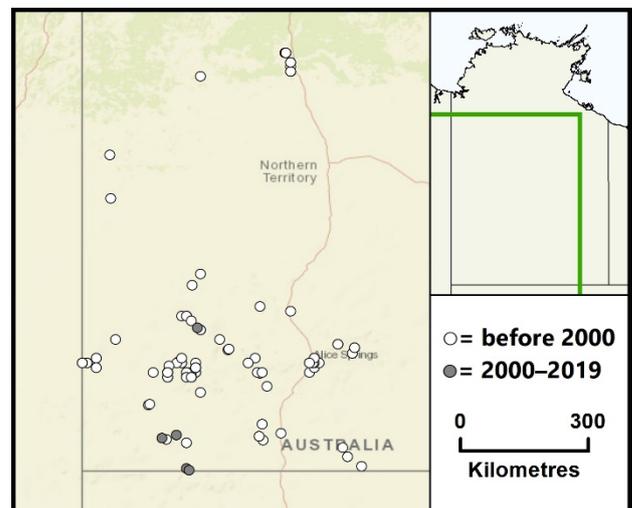
### Description

The Princess Parrot is a very distinctive bird, with a slim build and a very long, tapering tail. It is a medium-sized parrot with a total length of 40–45 cm and a body mass of 90–120 g. Most of the body is dull olive-green, which is palest on the underparts. It has a blue-grey crown, pink chin, throat and foreneck, prominent yellow-green shoulder patches, bluish rump and back, blue-green uppertail and red bill.

### Distribution

The Princess Parrot has a patchy and irregular distribution in arid Australia. In the Northern Territory (NT), it occurs in the southern section of the Tanami Desert south to Angas Downs and Yulara and east to Alice Springs. The exact distribution within this range is not well understood, and it is unclear whether the species is resident in the NT. Most records from the MacDonnell Ranges bioregion are during dry periods.

NT conservation reserves where reported: Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park and Tjoritja/West MacDonnell National Park.



Caption: Known localities of the Princess Parrot in the NT ([nrmmaps.nt.gov.au](http://nrmmaps.nt.gov.au))

### Ecology and life-history

The Princess Parrot usually occupies swales between sand dunes and is occasionally seen on the slopes and crests of dunes. This habitat consists mostly of shrubs such as *Eremophila* spp., *Grevillea* spp., and *Hakea* spp., with scattered trees. Some records are from riverine forest, woodland and shrubland.

Princess Parrots are nomadic. They are regularly seen at few localities in the NT, and even here

there may be long intervals (up to 20 years) between records.

The species is highly gregarious, usually occurring in small flocks of 10–20 individuals. Large flocks of up to 100 or more are occasionally encountered.

Princess Parrots breed in hollows of large eucalypt trees, particularly River Red Gums *Eucalyptus camaldulensis*, and also in Desert Oaks *Allocasuarina decaisneana*. Pairs may breed alone or in small colonies of up to 10 pairs. Clutch size is typically 4–6 eggs.

The Princess Parrot feeds on the ground and in flowering shrubs and trees. The diet consists mostly of seeds, with flowers, nectar and leaves being of secondary importance.

## Threatening processes

No specific threatening process has been identified for the Princess Parrot. However, it is possible that the process of environmental degradation and habitat homogenization that has occurred throughout arid Australia following European settlement may have negatively affected the species. Grazing by European Rabbits *Oryctolagus cuniculus* and introduced herbivores and changes in fire regimes are all likely to have contributed to this process.

The large increase in the feral Camel *Camelus dromedarius* population in arid Australia may have reduced or altered the availability of favoured food plants of the Princess Parrot. The impact of land degradation has been most severe in the margins of the range of this species.

On a local scale, raiding of nests to collect eggs and capture fledglings for the overseas bird market may affect breeding colonies.

## Conservation objectives and management

There is no existing management program for the Princess Parrot.

Research and management priorities for the species are to: i) record any sightings of the

species in the NT in an appropriate database(s); and ii) attempt to locate areas where the species is regularly present, particularly drought refuges, in order to undertake an assessment of threats and ecology, and thence inform appropriate management.

## References

<sup>1</sup> Garnett, S.T., Crowley, G.M., 2000. The Action Plan for Australian Birds. Environment Australia, Canberra.