

TAXON SUMMARY

Slender-billed Thornbill (eastern)

| | | |
|---|---------------------|---|
| 1 | Family | Pardalotidae |
| 2 | Scientific name | <i>Acanthiza iredalei hedleyi</i> Mathews, 1912 |
| 3 | Common name | Slender-billed Thornbill (eastern) |
| 4 | Conservation status | Near Threatened: a |

5 Reasons for listing

Habitat suitable for this subspecies has been reduced by at least half (Near Threatened: a).

| | Estimate | Reliability |
|------------------------|------------------------|-------------|
| Extent of occurrence | 12,000 km ² | medium |
| trend | stable | high |
| Area of occupancy | 1,000 km ² | low |
| trend | stable | medium |
| No. of breeding birds | 24,000 | low |
| trend | stable | medium |
| No. of sub-populations | 4 | low |
| Largest sub-population | 20,000 | low |
| Generation time | 4 years | low |

6 Intraspecific taxa

A. i. rosinae (St Vincent's Gulf, S. A.) is Vulnerable, *A. i. iredalei* (southern arid zone of Western Australia and South Australia west to Spencer Gulf) is Least Concern.

7 Past range and abundance

Fragmented distribution across Big and Little Deserts, Vic. (Emison *et al.*, 1987) and Ninety Mile Plain, S. A. with a few isolated occurrences in south-eastern South Australia (Parker, 1985).

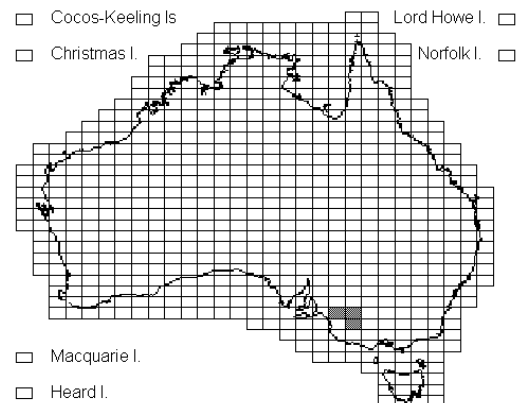
8 Present range and abundance

As above, except for possible expansion of range since 1967 into Big Heath Conservation Park, S. A. (Parker, 1985). Sub-population in Ngarkat Conservation Park and Big and Little Deserts estimated at about 20,000, with as few as 4,000 outside (Matthew, 1994). Of all the mallee specialists in Ngarkat, the Slender-billed Thornbill is the most abundant (L. Pedler).

9 Ecology

The eastern subspecies of Slender-billed Thornbill occurs in low heathland dominated by casuarinas and banksias, interspersed with other heath plants such as paperbarks *Melaleuca* and hakeas. It usually avoids adjacent eucalypt woodland, which is often occupied by other thornbills such as the Buff-rumped Thornbill *Acanthiza reguloides* (Gilmore, 1985, Parker, 1985). Slender-billed Thornbill are most abundant 2-3 years after fire and appear to have a lower density in the dense 2 m high climax community that develops in the 30 year post-fire period (L. Pedler, D. Paton). The bird

also occurs in taller tea-tree *Leptospermum* heathland that is recovering from fire, and on the margins of claypans (H. and M. Possingham). The birds build domed nests and lay 2-3 eggs (Beruldsen, 1980).



10 Threats

Clearance for agriculture has affected the subspecies in the South Australian part of its range (Parker, 1985), but has now largely ceased. Large-scale fire within remaining habitat is frequent and could be affecting the thornbill's abundance, especially as many of the sub-populations are now more isolated than they were previously. Even in Victoria, where large areas of suitable habitat are conserved, the sub-populations within the Big and Little Deserts seem fragmented. Such fragmentation may be natural, but warrants investigation.

11 Recommended actions

- 11.1 Determine current distribution, probably through Birds Australia Atlas.
- 11.2 Monitor known sub-populations.
- 11.3 Develop and implement fire management strategies that cater for the full range of mallee-dependent species.

12 Bibliography

- Beruldsen, G. R. 1980. *A Field Guide to Nests and Eggs of Australian Birds*. Rigby, Adelaide.
- Emison, W. B., Beardsell, C. M., Norman, F. I., Loyn, R. H. and Bennett, S. C. 1987. *Atlas of Victorian Birds*. Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands and RAOU, Melbourne.

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