

TAXON SUMMARY

Slender-billed Thornbill (western)

1	Family	Pardalotidae
2	Scientific name	<i>Acanthiza iredalei iredalei</i> Mathews, 1911
3	Common name	Slender-billed Thornbill (western)
4	Conservation status	Least Concern

5 Reasons for listing

Although the subspecies has suffered a contraction of range in the east, there is little evidence for a decline in the more extensive area outside agricultural areas.

	Estimate	Reliability
Extent of occurrence	1,400,000 km ²	medium
trend	stable	high
Area of occupancy	400,000 km ²	low
trend	stable	high
No. of breeding birds	100,000	low
trend	stable	medium
No. of sub-populations	2	low
Largest sub-population	95,500	low
Generation time	4 years	low

6 Intraspecific taxa

A. i. hedleyi (south-east South Australia and central western Victoria) is Near Threatened. *A. i. rosinae* (Gulf of St Vincent) is Vulnerable.

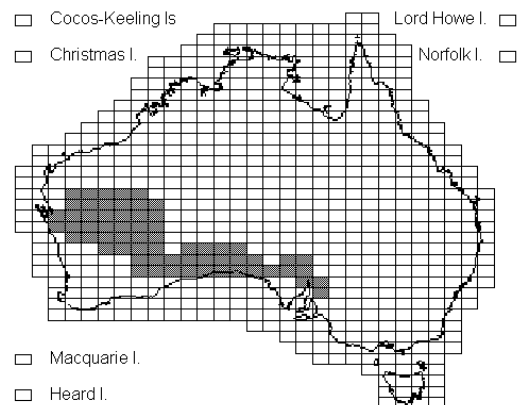
7 Past range and abundance

Sparsely distributed across arid and semi-arid southern Western Australia and western South Australia from the west coast south of Carnarvon to the east coast of Spencer Gulf and east of the Flinders Ra. Sub-populations on the Nullarbor Plain appear to have been separated historically from those in Gawler Ra. and east of Flinders Ra. (Matthew, 1994). Records from southern Northern Territory (Parker, 1971) apparently in doubt (Schodde and Mason, 1999).

8 Present range and abundance

As above but no recent records from east of Flinders Ra., S. A., Port Broughton on Spencer Gulf, S. A., or Lake Violet, W. A. (Parker, 1971, Blakers *et al.*, 1984, Storr 1985, J. Matthew, L. Pedler). Remaining sub-populations may be more fragmented. In South Australia, numbers have been estimated at over 30,000 individuals, including 10,000 on the Nullarbor, 15,000 Gawler Ra. and upper Eyre Peninsula, 4,000 north-east of Tarcoola and 1,000 near Port Pirie (Matthew, 1994). A sub-population may persist east of the Flinders Ra. and in the north of South Australia, but it would be scattered and small (Matthew, 1994, Brandle, 1998). No population estimates for Western Australia but, as the area of occupation is at least 4 times more

extensive than in South Australia, the population is likely to be larger.



9 Ecology

The western subspecies of the Slender-billed Thornbill occupies treeless chenopod shrubland. In central and western Western Australia, it favours saline flats associated with salt lakes (Storr, 1985, 1986), particularly where there is glasswort *Halosarcia* (P. Curry). In South Australia and south-eastern Western Australia, it occurs on plains dominated by bluebush *Maireana* and saltbush *Atriplex* (Storr, 1987, Matthew, 1994). On the Nullarbor Plain, it is only present in areas with bluebush and where there is shrub cover of at least 15% (Matthew, 1994). There is also a sub-population in samphire on the shores of Spencer Gulf (Matthew, 1994, Schodde and Mason, 1999). The thornbill builds a domed nests near the ground in a bush, and lay 2-3 eggs (Beruldsen, 1980).

10 Threats

Chenopod shrublands across southern Australia are used for grazing sheep and, though stocking densities tend to be lower today than early in the 20th century, much of the habitat is still degraded. The effects of sheep are exacerbated by grazing of seedlings and ring-barking of shrubs by rabbits. A reduction in grazing on the Nullarbor and of rabbits may be allowing some recovery of the habitat.

11 Recommended actions

- 11.1 Determine effects of sheep and rabbits.
- 11.2 Determine ability of subspecies to recolonise isolated habitat.
- 11.3 Determine past and present distribution.

- 11.4 Develop management guidelines for preferred habitat.
- 11.5 Conduct a public education program among land managers to encourage the adoption of the management guidelines.

12 Bibliography

Beruldsen, G. R. 1980. *A Field Guide to Nests and Eggs of Australian Birds*. Rigby, Adelaide.

Blakers, M., Davies, S. J. J. F. and Reilly, P. N. 1984. *The Atlas of Australian Birds*. RAOU and Melbourne University Press, Melbourne.

Brandle, R. (ed.) 1998. *A Biological Survey of the Stony Deserts, South Australia 1994-1997*. Department for Environment, Heritage and Aboriginal Affairs and National Parks Foundation of South Australia, Adelaide.

Matthew, J. 1994. The status, distribution and habitat of the Slender-billed Thornbill *Acanthiza iredalei* in South Australia. *S. Aust. Ornithol.* 32:1-23.

Parker, S. A. 1971. Critical notes on the status of some central Australian birds. *Emu* 71:99-102.

Schodde, R. and Mason, I. J. 1999. *The Directory of Australian Birds: Passerines*. CSIRO, Collingwood, Victoria.

Storr, G. M. 1985. Birds of the mid-eastern interior of Western Australia. *Rec. W. Aust. Mus. Suppl.* 22.

Storr, G. M. 1986. Birds of the south-eastern interior of Western Australia. *Rec. W. Aust. Mus. Suppl.* 26.

Storr, G. M. 1987. Birds of the Eucla Division of Western Australia. *Rec. W. Aust. Mus. Suppl.* 27.

Comments received from

John Blyth, Allan Burbidge, Andrew Burbidge, Peter Copley, Lynn Pedler, Adrian Stokes.