

**RANGE EXTENSION OF THE SLATY-BACKED THORNBILL.** Matthew and Kernot (1992) extended the reported range of the Slaty-backed Thornbill *Acanthiza robustirostris* in mulga *Acacia aneura* dominated habitats southwards into the Un-named Conservation Park in the eastern Great Victoria Desert. The following observations further extend the species' known range into the Barton Sandhills near the Trans-Australia railway (see Figure). Birds were identified by their grey upperparts, dark eyes, unstreaked breast, fine black streaking on the forehead and distinctive 'tiz-tiz' calls.

**Record 1** – dog fence 50 km W of Mabel Creek Homestead (28°59'S, 133°49'E). On 28–29 June 1993 we saw a group of four Slaty-backed Thornbills foraging with Chestnut-rumped Thornbills *Acanthiza uropygialis* in mulga open scrub (trees of various age classes) over scarlet emu-bush *Eremophila latrobei* and grasses.

**Record 2** – dog fence 55 km WSW of Mabel Creek Homestead (29°10'S, 133°49'E). On 29–30 June 1993 we located two birds foraging in a dense patch of mulga on a clay flat between dunes.

**Record 3** – Edoldeh Waterhole 15 km NW of Wynbring (30°28'S, 133°25'E). On 13 July 1998 a group of about six birds was observed among and occasionally hovering adjacent to the foliage of sandhill mulgas *Acacia ramulosa* on low dunes. The birds were foraging with several Chestnut-rumped Thornbills and an uncoloured Splendid Fairy-wren *Malurus splendens*. We were alerted to the Slaty-backed Thornbills by a harsh 'tiz-tiz' call reminiscent of the Striated Thornbill *Acanthiza lineata*.

**Record 4** – 120 km WNW of Commonwealth Hill Homestead, 5 km N of Dog Flat Gate (29°44'S, 133°00'E). During October 1998 GAC assisted on a survey of the effects of stock grazing on birdlife conducted by the CSIRO. During 21–24 October at least two small groups of Slaty-backed Thornbills were located in patches of dense regenerating mulgas on low sandhills. Chestnut-rumped Thornbills were common and breeding in the area, with immature birds noted as having a dark eye and lacking the scalloping seen on the forehead of adults.

In addition to the above records, P. Mahar (SAOA 1992) reported two birds 31 km E of

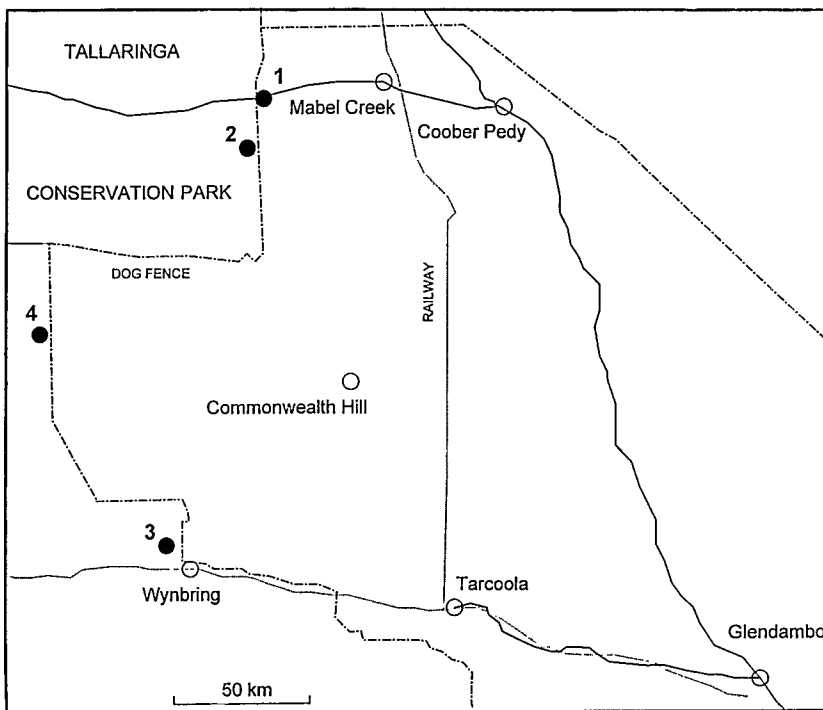


Figure. Map showing the locations of the recent southerly reports of Slaty-backed Thornbills in South Australia.

Emu on 3 November 1988 and Dennett (1995) recorded small numbers at two mulga dominated sites in the north of the recently dedicated Tallaringa Conservation Park, 80 km WSW of Cadney Park, between 29 September and 5 October 1993. Identification in these records was based on the presence of red eyes and lack of streaking on the underparts.

The above records indicate that Slaty-backed Thornbills are more widely distributed in mulga and sandhill mulga dominated habitats in western South Australia than previously recognised, presumably having been overlooked because of their unobtrusive habits. Mulga habitats are widespread in this region, extending south to the Gawler Ranges and east towards Lakes Eyre and Torrens. Of note is that all except one of the above reports were west of the dog fence, where dense stands of mulga with a mixed age structure occur. In the pastoral land to the east, Slaty-backed Thornbills may have declined since the introduct-

ion of artificial watering points. The watering points have supported stock and high numbers of kangaroos, both of which have inhibited mulga regeneration (GAC, pers. obs.).

#### REFERENCES

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