

STRIATED GRASSWRENS IN ATYPICAL HABITAT

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In January 1978 I saw a Striated Grasswren *Amytornis striatus* moving along the edge of a sandy track on my property ca 8 km SSE of Malinong, east of Lake Alexandrina. I watched it for about 30 seconds from a distance of about 20 yards before it moved off into an extensive area of *Banksia* heath adjacent to the track. Shortly afterwards, on 18 February 1978, I saw another *A. striatus* some 3.2 kilometres north of this spot, and was able to collect it (S. Aust. Mus. B31314). Since that time, my sons and I have had intermittent sightings of the species at the original locality, including two of two birds together; we thus infer that a pair resides in that vicinity.

This represents a slight south-westerly extension of range for *A. striatus*, the nearest previously known locality being Sherlock some 40 kilometres away, where both G. B. Ragless and I have seen the species. The significant feature of the Malinong occurrence, however is that porcupine grass *Triodia*, generally considered essential for *A. striatus*, is not present in the area where the birds have been seen. In fact, on 4,500 acres of the original property, only two clumps of *Triodia* have so far been found. The area apparently favoured by the birds is dominated by heathy shrubs such as *Banksia*,

dwarf *Casuarina*, *Adenanthos*, *Isopogon*, *Xanthorrhoea*, *Phyllota* and *Baeckia*, with some stunted *Eucalyptus leucoxylon*, *E. foecunda*, *Hakea* and *Lasiopetalum* growing on a stony outcrop.

Because the birds appeared to reside in that locality, it seemed that they must also nest there, though *Triodia* is the only recorded nesting plant for *A. striatus*. Accordingly, G. B. Ragless and I conducted several searches of the area, but failed to find an occupied nest. However, we did find the remains of four nests in varying stages of decay that G. B. Ragless considers on shapes, construction and position attributable to this species (one collected, B32751). All were placed well-hidden within tussocks of the cutting-grass *Gahnia deusta* (identified by L. Williams, Dept. of Environment and Planning). We searched other plants we considered possible for nesting sites, such as *Lepidosperma viscidum* and *Hakea rugosa*, but without success. *Calamanthus sericornis fuliginosus*, Shy Hylacola *S. cautus*, Southern Emu-wren *Stipiturus malachurus* and two species of fairy-wrens *Malurus* have been seen in or near the area frequented by *A. striatus*, so it is not a case of the last-named having utilized a niche left vacant by similar birds.

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