

THE ACTION PLAN FOR AUSTRALIAN BIRDS 2000 by S.T. Garnett and G.M. Crowley. Environment Australia, Canberra. 673 pp., distribution maps, soft-cover, A4 size. Available at no cost from the Community Information Unit, Environment Australia, GPO Box 787, Canberra ACT 2601; ph. 1800 803 772; ciu@ea.gov.au; or download from Environment Australia's website at www.ea.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/action/birds2000/index.html

Stephen Garnett and Gabriel Crowley spent eighteen months reviewing the conservation status of all the birds of Australia and its territories while preparing the *Action Plan for Australian Birds 2000*. The plan lists 25 taxa as Extinct, 32 as Critically Endangered, 82 as Vulnerable and 81 as Near Threatened. This represents a substantial increase in the number of listed taxa since the first action plan for Australian birds (Garnett 1992). The remaining 1114 taxa considered by the new plan are classified as

Least Concern and these include 28 introduced species and 95 vagrants.

The plan provides brief recovery outlines for all Threatened taxa, and gives taxon summaries for Extinct and Near Threatened taxa and 53 of the Least Concern taxa that have restricted distributions or have been considered threatened previously.

IUCN criteria (IUCN 1994) were applied to what is currently known about each of these Australian birds to determine their conservation status. These criteria, which are outlined in the plan, include considerations of population size, extent of occurrence, area of occupancy, quality of habitat, number of locations or sub-populations and projected declines in populations or habitats. The criteria help people to understand the nature of population threats affecting particular species, and being rigorous and repeatable, provide an opportunity for monitoring and re-assessment of species' status over time.

The recovery outlines for each threatened taxon include reasons for listing, past and present range and abundance, ecology, threats, gaps in knowledge, recovery actions, estimated costs and contact organisations. The 'Reasons for Listing' section provides estimates of extent of occurrence, number of breeding birds, and population trends, for example, and indicates the reliability of the estimates. Low reliability scores highlight gaps in our collective knowledge, as is the case for important aspects of the ecology of many taxa, and hopefully provide the impetus for further research on critical aspects of these birds.

Some additional important sections appear towards the end of the document; namely the 'Distribution of Listed Taxa', 'Analysis of Threats' and 'Coordinated Conservation Plans'.

In general terms, the plan indicates that listed taxa are concentrated on offshore islands, in areas intensively farmed and settled by humans, and along the Australia's Fishing Zone in the Southern Ocean.

Habitat destruction and fragmentation through continuing land clearance remains as the highest

threat. Other significant threats include grazing by stock, changes in fire regimes, and introduced predators, particularly on islands.

Eighteen areas, including the Mt Lofty Ranges, are listed because of their high concentrations of threatened or near threatened taxa. In fact the plan was one of the catalysts for the recent formation of the Mt Lofty Ranges Declining Birds Taskforce.

A feature of the action plan process was the extensive consultation by the authors which included placing a draft of the plan on the internet and calling for comments over an extended period of time. Over 150 people, amounting to a significant body of ornithological expertise, are listed as having commented on taxa in the plan.

To prevent the extinction of up to 15 taxa and reduce the number of Threatened or Near Threatened taxa by 20, the authors estimate that over the next five years the required budget will be \$35 million for conservation agencies, \$12 million from other sources and \$7 million from volunteers. On mainland Australia and in Tasmania, 82% of all bird taxa have been affected by land clearance at some stage in recent history, and for half, land clearance is a continuing threat that will cause declines for years to come due to habitat degradation and fragmentation.

The *Action Plan for Australian Birds 2000* is a highly recommended reference for anyone seriously interested in the future of our bird populations; professional and amateur ornithologists and planners alike.

REFERENCES

- Brouwer, J. and Garnett, S. (eds). 1990. *Threatened birds of Australia: an annotated list*. RAOU report number 68. RAOU and ANPWS, Melbourne.
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