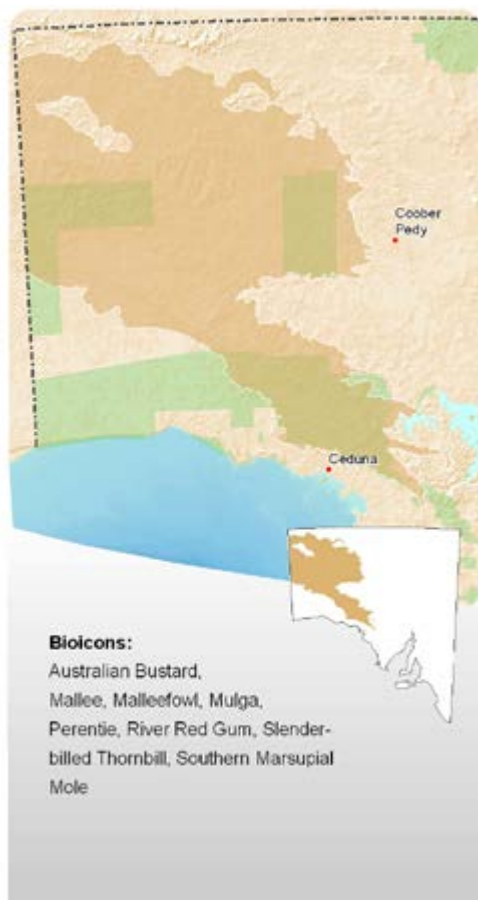


Great Victoria Desert



Photo G.Richardson



The Great Victoria Desert bioregion is located in the western half of South Australia and stretches into Western Australia. The desert, after which the bioregion is named, is the largest in Australia.

It has an arid climate with warm to extremely hot summers and mild to warm winters. The bioregion receives about 100mm to 250mm of rain per year but, like much of the arid zone, it varies significantly from year to year.

Water is a particularly precious resource and only the hardiest of plants and animals can survive in these harsh conditions.

In the 1950's and 60's, nuclear weapon trials were conducted in the bioregion and several areas were, and remain, contaminated.

Biodiversity and habitat

The bioregion has dunes and swales with playa lakes, lunettes and rocky areas.

There are many types of vegetation including chenopod and sapphire shrublands, acacia shrublands and open woodlands, eucalypt open woodlands, casuarina and mallee shrublands and woodlands.

Rare or threatened animals include the Malleefowl, Sandhill Dunnart and the Southern Marsupial Mole.



Threats

Threats to the Great Victoria Desert bioregion and its dependent species include:

- clearance and fragmentation of vegetation by developments such as mining and exploration
- Overgrazing by feral animals, especially camels and rabbits, and damage to waterholes by camels.

The Great Victoria Desert bioregion supports most of the known population of Sandhill Dunnarts.

Conservation

The land in this bioregion is mainly used for traditional purposes by Indigenous people. Vast areas have been set aside for nature conservation. More recently, there has been increased interest in mining for mineral sands in the bioregion.

The region includes a number of nature reserves, some of which include the Mamungari Conservation Park, Tallaringa Conservation Park, Yellabinna Regional Reserve and Yumbarra Conservation Park.

You can help conserve the Great Victoria Desert bioregion and its dependent species by:

- Telling people about desert ecosystems and the ways in which plants and animals have adapted to live in them.

For further information

Public enquiries

For more local information on any of the species in this resource please contact your nearest Natural Resource Centre office on:

Eastwood: (08) 8273 9100

Gawler: (08) 8523 7700

Lobethal: (08) 8389 5900

Willunga: (08) 8550 3400

Education enquiries

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Australian Bustard

Ardeotis australis



One of Australia's largest birds, the Australian Bustard is up to one metre tall with a wingspan of up to 2.3 metres! Heavy bodied, ground-dwelling birds, males (5-10 kilograms) are up to three times heavier than females (2-3 kilograms). An upright posture, long legs and a black cap of feathers on their heads make them easy to recognise. This bird has the distinction of being Australia's heaviest flying bird. When disturbed these birds walk away slowly (looking quite superior with their heads in the air!). They are strong in flight and sometimes move from one area to another.

Diet

The Australian Bustard is omnivorous, foraging on insects, young birds, lizards, mice, leaves, seeds and fruit. In the arid parts of their range, Australian Bustards are primarily nomadic, tracking rainfall and food sources opportunistically across the landscape.

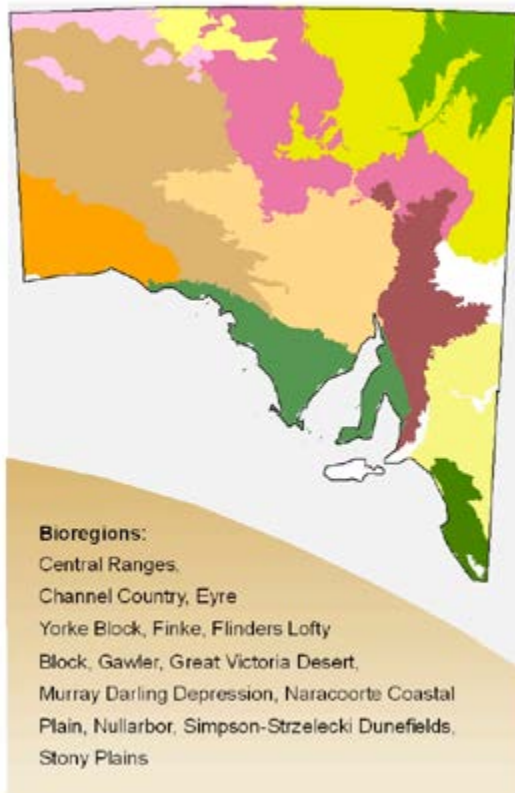
Breeding

Australian Bustards breed once a year using what is called a 'lek' mating system. This means that when mating, each male uses a 'display site' to try and attract a female. Males put on a show by inflating a large throat sac and strutting around with their tails up making a loud, deep, roaring noise. Females then choose which male to mate with on the basis of their size and display. In the drier arid areas of SA they may not use the lek system, some being more solitary and even monogamous.

From September to November, eggs are laid in a hollow on the ground where the female has a good view of approaching threats while being well camouflaged. Females incubate one to two, rarely three, eggs for around 24 days. After mating males play no further part in raising the chicks.

Habitat

The Australian Bustard lives on dry plains, grasslands and open woodlands, and they favour tussock and hummock grasslands. Occasionally they are seen in modified habitat areas such as farmlands and golf courses.



Map courtesy of Mapping Unit, Customer and Commercial Services.

Map is not intended to indicate spatial distribution of the species, only the bioregions in which the species is found.



Fire followers! Groups of Australian Bustards have been seen flocking to fires to eat animals flushed out or killed by them.

Threats

Past hunting reduced their populations and illegal hunting continues. Predation by cats and foxes, habitat degradation from overgrazing rabbits and stock, and habitat clearance and alteration are other major threats to the Australian Bustard. Secondary poisoning from rabbit baiting can also pose a threat to them. These threats have seen a large scale decline in their population in south-east Australia. They are largely now found in northern Australia and southern New Guinea.

Conservation

You can help the Australian Bustard by:

- keeping our wildlife wild! Bustards could become more vulnerable to illegal hunters if they are fed or tamed and if disturbed their nests could fail
- being a responsible pet owner – desex your pets, keep them inside at night and don't take them into national parks.



Photo by Mark Ziembicki

Australian Bustard

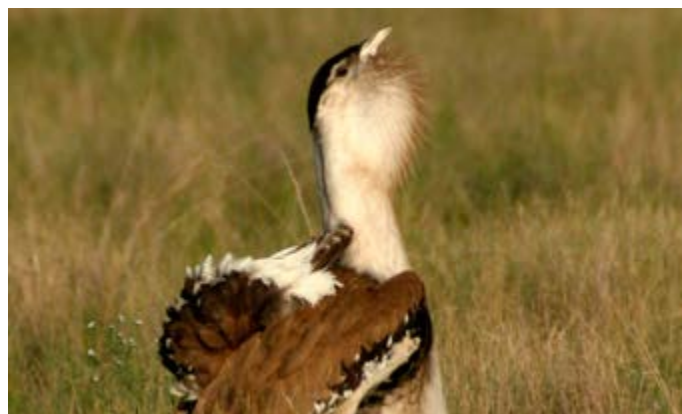


Photo by Bruce Doran

Australian Bustard

For further information

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Mallee

Eucalyptus spp.



Map courtesy of Mapping Unit, Customer and Commercial Services.

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Mallee comes from an Aboriginal name for a group of eucalypts that grow two to nine metres high. They are multi-stemmed and grow from underground woody bases called lignotubers. Mallee is also the name for the vegetation communities in which Mallee eucalypts grow. These communities usually include several layers of vegetation from large shrubs to small grasses and ephemerals. Mallee support a wide range of biodiversity, including the Malleefowl.

Leaf litter is slow to decompose in Mallee areas because of the dry conditions, so there is often plenty of fuel for a fire. Mallee eucalypts have adapted to cope well with fire. They grow vigorously from dormant shoots under the bark of the branches, the trunks, or the lignotuber. This is called epicormic growth.

Lignotubers store water and nutrients so new branches can grow if they have been damaged or cut to the ground. This has been very annoying for farmers trying to cut them down. They are also very difficult to remove from the ground and used to break a lot of ploughs as they are solid and rock-like. Large-scale clearance started in SA around 1900 when the stump-jump plough was invented. Farmers then conquered the Mallee, but when the trees were gone there were problems with the soil becoming too salty and eroding away. It was realised too late that plant cover is very important for keeping the soil stable and stopping salt water from rising to the surface.

Habitat

Mallee eucalypts grow in the semi-arid parts of southern Australia, and have many adaptations that help them survive the hot, dry conditions. Like most eucalypts, they close the pores of their leaves (stomates) during the heat of the day so they lose less moisture through evaporation.

Threats

Being cleared for agriculture is the biggest threat to Mallees both historically and today. Drought caused by climatic change and too frequent and intense bushfires put pressure on populations of these trees. Their understorey is often grazed on by sheep, cattle and goats. Rabbits also graze on new shoots which can make it more difficult for them to grow. Salinity and habitat fragmentation are other problems Mallee plants face.



Musical Mallees! Didgeridoos are made from the stems of Mallee eucalypts that have been hollowed out by termites.

Conservation

You can help Mallee eucalypts by:

- preserving these trees on your property
- being waterwise at home and helping ease the strain on our limited water sources
- getting involved with revegetation projects like the Million Trees Project.

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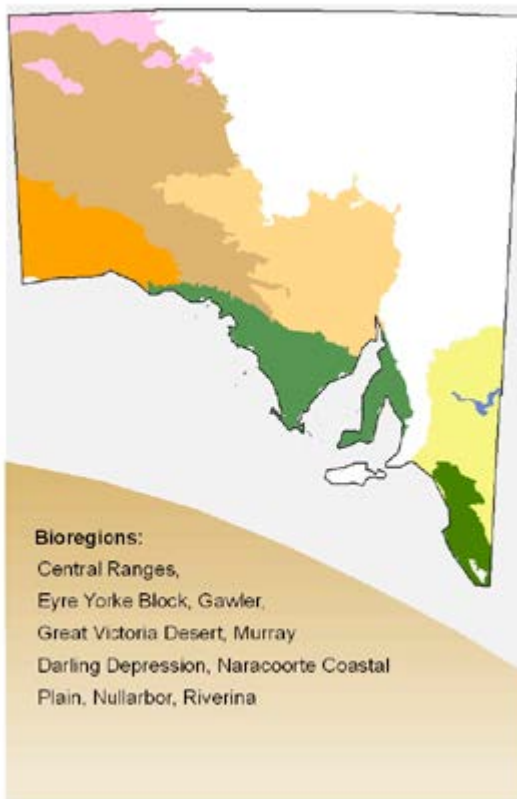
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Malleefowl

Leipoa ocellata



Map courtesy of Mapping Unit, Customer and Commercial Services.

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Malleefowl are shy, ground-dwelling birds about the size of a domestic chicken. Malleefowl are Australia's largest megapodes and are also known as mound builders.

Diet

They feed on a variety of seeds, flowers, fruits, tubers, fungi, herbs and invertebrates.

Breeding

Malleefowl usually mate with the same partner for life, and pairs spend most of their time together. Nest building and maintenance take about 11 months of the year so they are usually found in the vicinity of the nest. Malleefowl mounds are approximately four metres across and 75cm high, made of leaves and sandy earth. They incubate their eggs inside these mounds, and warmth is produced by the heating of the sand by the sun and the decomposition of vegetation (like compost). They control the temperature of the nest by adding or removing vegetation to the mound. They begin laying their eggs when the nest temperature reaches around 33°C; the female then lays an egg every five to seven days until the end of summer. They can lay up to 30 eggs in one season. Males stay near the mounds, repeatedly checking the temperature with their tongues. Many eggs hatch but few chicks survive as the camouflage of their mottled feathers is their only defence and they are easy prey for foxes.

Habitat

Once common over most of the southern half of Australia, they are now only sparsely distributed from southern Western Australia to central New South Wales. They occupy semi-arid to arid shrublands and woodlands but are found mainly in mallee woodland habitat that has not recently been burnt.

Threats

Malleefowl are threatened by the fact that their population is small and isolated. Habitat destruction is another threat. Being ground-dwelling birds they are preyed upon by foxes and feral cats. Rabbit, goat, deer and stock grazing impacts on their habitat and stock, feral goats and deer can trample their nests. Increased incidences of bushfire destroy leaf litter they need for nest building as well as habitat.



Digging up out of the mound (nest) can take newly hatched chicks up to 15 hours, and they can fly within hours of hatching!

Conservation

Current management strategies for Malleefowl include the fencing of areas of habitat to keep out stock and feral deer, controlling rabbits and foxes, undertaking monitoring surveys and captive breeding programs.

You can help the Malleefowl by:

- being a responsible pet owner – desex your cats and dogs, keep them inside at night and don't take them into national parks
- avoiding taking firewood from Malleefowl habitat areas
- joining a conservation group to help look after Malleefowl habitat.

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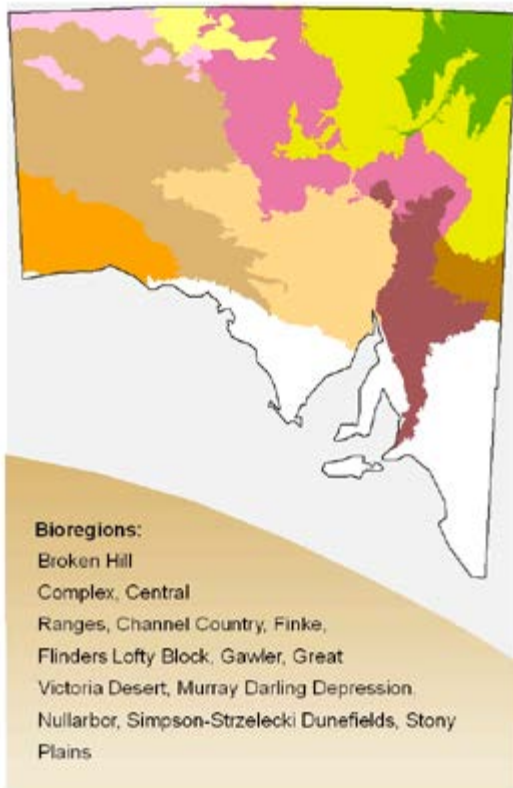
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Mulga

Acacia anuera



Map courtesy of Mapping Unit, Customer and Commercial Services.

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Mulgas are single or multi-stemmed acacias. They are classified as a small tree or a large shrub and are the main species in many desert ecosystems, such as Mulga woodlands. Mulgas are also an important food source for stock, especially during droughts.

While most acacias have relatively short life spans, Mulgas are long lived. They can grow to a maximum height of 10 metres. Reduced rainfall or drought conditions can slow or temporarily stop the growth of Mulgas. For this reason, it sometimes takes a Mulga tree 100 years to become mature. It is believed they can live between 300-400 years.

Acacias do not have leaves in a botanical sense, but instead have phyllodes. These are slim, flattened leafstalks. Phyllodes are arranged to avoid full sun and channel rainwater to the roots.

Underground, Mulgas have a taproot which can help the plant access deeper moisture and store water and nutrients. Mulga seedlings which are just 10cm high may have taproots extending three metres into the ground.

Mulga wood is very hard and is popular for use as fence posts and in craftwork. Mulga also had a wide range of traditional uses for some groups of Aboriginal people. These included: food from the seeds, lerps and sap; tools from the wood; resin from the phyllodes; and medicines from the leaflets and twigs. The name 'Mulga' comes from the name one Aboriginal group used for the shields they made from its wood. Honey Ants (*Camponotus inflatus*) make their nests underground beneath Mulga trees. These ants are another popular traditional food as their abdomens are full of a sweet honey-like substance.

Reproduction

Mulgas produce bright yellow flowers at any time of year, usually following rain.

Habitat

Mulgas are common in arid to semi-arid areas of South Australia, New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory.



Threats

The key threats to Mulga are introduced herbivores, such as rabbits and goats, some of which have established feral populations and led to the suppression of the regeneration of arid shrubs such as Mulga and thereby threatening their long-term survival. In some areas, seedlings are eaten and trampled on by rabbits and goats which can be devastating. It is unlikely that there was any successful Mulga regeneration between the 1880's and the 1950s due to the impact of the rabbit!

Mulga trees are also threatened mainly by past and present clearance for agriculture. Changed fire regimes can be another problem – acacias are less fire resistant than eucalyptus.

Climate change also creates a less suitable habitat.

Small insects called Red Mulga Lerp (*Austrotachardia acaciae*) live on the outer branches of Mulga trees. They exude a honey dew to protect themselves from animals. which can be sucked straight off the branch, or soaked in water to make a sweet drink!

Conservation

You can help the Mulga by:

- finding out more about the many ways Aboriginal people use Mulgas and telling your class about it
- getting involved with revegetation projects, like the Million Trees Program.

For further information

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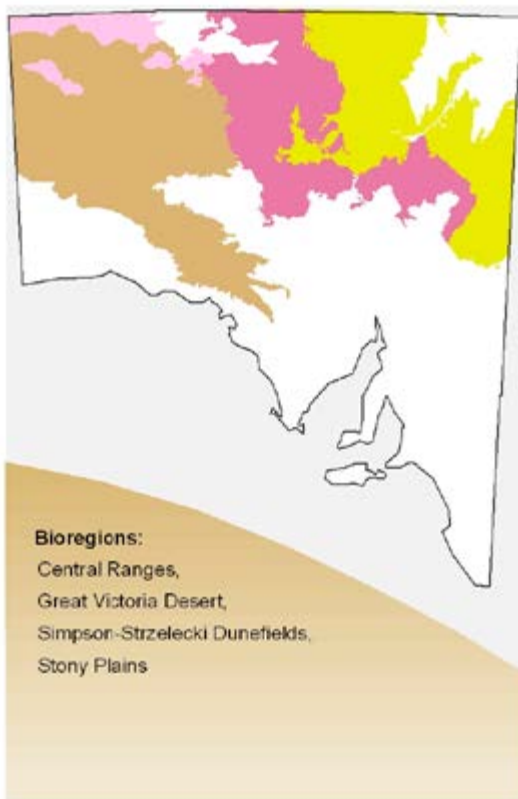
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Perentie

Varanus giganteus



Map courtesy of Mapping Unit, Customer and Commercial Services.

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The Perentie is the largest lizard in Australia, growing up to 2.5 metres long. They belong to the monitor family, commonly referred to as goannas. Their appearance is distinctive, with a forked tongue, a long neck and powerful limbs each with five clawed toes on the end. They also have a strong tail and numerous sharp curved, backward pointing teeth. Perenties hibernate from May to August.

They are able to sprint either on all fours or on their hind legs. To get a better view of their surroundings they can stand on their hind legs and balance on their tails. When standing normally or walking, Perenties hold themselves off the ground on their stout legs. This keeps them cooler, away from the heat of the ground. Perenties sometimes lunge forward with an open mouth, either as a bluff or an attack.

Researchers have recently discovered that their bite is slightly venomous. When threatened they rise up, inflate their throat and hiss. If the predator persists they run away, or use their strong tail in defence.

Perenties are a traditional source of food for Aboriginal people living in desert regions.

Diet

They forage on turtle eggs, insects, birds, other reptiles (including juvenile Perenties) mammals and carrion.

Breeding

Female Perenties lay 6-12 eggs beneath a large object or mound. Sometimes they bury eggs in termite mounds where the activity of the insects provides constant warmth. Young are brightly coloured and hatch within three to nine months.

Habitat

Perenties live in arid and semi-arid regions of Australia from Western Queensland to coastal Western Australia. They usually prefer areas around rocky hills and outcrops. To shelter, some Perenties dig burrows with their powerful front legs and claws or take over rabbit burrows. Burrows can be quite large and have several escape exits. Others choose to find shelter in deep rock crevices instead.

Threats

Perenties are preyed on by humans, wedge-tailed eagles and dingoes. Juveniles are preyed on by snakes and large goannas. Climate change is a threat to the Perenties in their desert habitats, and habitat destruction and degradation means they may have less places to live and less food to eat.



A taste for hunting! Like some snakes Perenties can pick up scents in the air and translate them using the Jacobson's organ located on the roof of the mouth. After catching their prey, they violently shake it until dead and swallow it whole.

Conservation

You can help the Perentie by:

- finding out more about the Perentie and other desert-dwelling species and giving a presentation to your class about them
- doing your bit to stop climate change by being wise with your energy use at home
- finding out about monitor lizards living on other parts of the world.



Photo by Peter Copley

Perentie

For further information

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River Red Gum

Eucalyptus camaldulensis



Map courtesy of Mapping Unit, Customer and Commercial Services.

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River Red Gums are large, single stemmed eucalypt trees. They can grow up to 45m tall but usually grow to 20–30m and they can live for 500–1000 years. There are two subspecies; a northern and a southern. The durability of River Red Gum wood and its natural resistance to termites meant it was used heavily by European settlers for railway sleepers, mine shafts and wharves. Today, they are the most commonly planted tree in arid and semi-arid areas of the world (mostly in timber plantations).

Like all eucalypts, River Red Gums have survival mechanisms that can help them through tough times. Seedlings can drop their leaves to save water, and grow new ones when water arrives. If damaged, they can grow a new shoot from the base of the stem.

Red Gum forests and wetlands provide valuable habitat for biodiversity. These trees are important breeding, nesting and feeding grounds for a range of bird species. Native mammals, such as echidnas and kangaroos, make their homes in the shelter of these trees. They also provide homes for rare and threatened species like Sugar Gliders (*Petaurus breviceps*) and Carpet Pythons (*Morelia spilota*).

Reproduction

A forest of River Red Gums can produce 250 million seeds per hectare per year. Ants, and other insects, take most of these, and the ones that are left need to be there at just the right time to germinate. If seeds fall too early, before the floods, they become submerged and die. Fall too late and they don't have enough time to grow before the dry heat of summer arrives.

Habitat

River Red Gums grow near wetlands, and particularly along river plains. Along low flood plains they are often the only tree species present, forming open forests. Their name originates from this habitat as well as the red colour of their timber.

Threats

Changed flood and flow patterns in the River Murray due to irrigation and storage lead to drought or permanent flooding, both of which can kill River Red Gums. Historical and current logging, grazing animals eating seedlings, and changed fire regimes are other threats. Feral pigs disturb large habitat areas by digging and wallowing.



Scarred for life! Aboriginal people used the bark of River Red Gums to make shelters, canoes and shields. They did all this without killing the tree, but the evidence can still be seen today.

Conservation

You can help the River Red Gums by:

- finding out more about the River Murray system and how important it is to life in Australia
- being careful with your water use at home. Check out the SA Water website
- getting involved with revegetation projects like the Million Trees Project.



Photo by Brian Walters

River Red Gum



Photo by Brian Walters

River Red Gum

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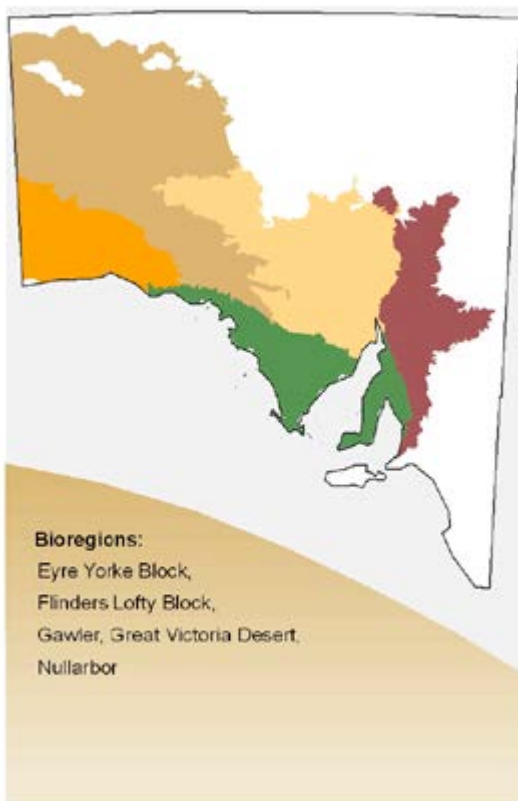
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Slender-billed Thornbill (Western)

Acanthiza iredalei iredalei



Map courtesy of Mapping Unit, Customer and Commercial Services.

Map is not intended to indicate spatial distribution of the species, only the bioregions in which the species is found.

The western subspecies of the Slender-billed Thornbill is a small bird, about 10cm in length with a wingspan of 14-15 centimetres. They only weigh 5-6 grams. Olive-grey/brown in colour, they have a black patch with white edges on their forehead. While they are usually seen in pairs or in small groups of up to 10 birds, they occasionally form flocks of up to 60 birds.

There are two other subspecies of Slender-billed Thornbills, but the western one is the most widespread. Both the eastern and the St Vincent Gulf subspecies also occur in South Australia. A reduction of grazing in the Nullarbor and other western areas of the state is allowing some of this bird's habitat to recover. It is estimated that around 100,000 individuals remain in the wild

Diet

They feed on insects, spiders, occasionally centipedes and the stems and leaves of some plants. Slender-billed Thornbills forage throughout the day, usually in shrubs and sometimes on the ground or by catching insects midair.

Breeding

Breeding occurs from July to October, usually following rainfall. Thornbills make dome-shaped nests in shrubs out of strips of bark and grass stuck together with cobwebs. They line them with other soft materials and they have an entrance in the side. The female lays a clutch of two to four eggs. When they hatch the chicks are fed by both parents, but more so by the female.

Habitat

Slender-billed Thornbills live in arid and semi-arid areas of southern Western Australia and south-western South Australia. Their preferred habitat includes shrublands, sometimes near mangroves, salt lakes, or salt flats. They usually choose chenopod shrublands dominated by Samphire (*Sarcocornia spp.*), Bluebush (*Maireana spp.*) or Saltbush (*Atriplex spp.*). Sometimes they have been seen in low heath on sand plains as well.

Threats

The impact of overgrazing by stock and rabbits on their habitat is the biggest threat to Slender-billed Thornbills. Changes to fire regimes that threaten their shrubland habitats are another problem for this bird. Mining and development activities may also be a threat to some of their habitat areas.



Puzzling extinction up north! The Slender-billed Thornbill is thought to be the only bird species to have become extinct in the Northern Territory since European settlement. No-one is quite sure why, as there is plenty of suitable habitat remaining!

Conservation

You can help the Slender-billed Thornbill (western) by:

- encouraging land managers to fence lower productivity land for conservation and land management purposes
- spreading the word – tell other people about the Slender-billed Thornbill.

For further information

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Southern Marsupial Mole

Notoryctes typhlops



Map courtesy of Mapping Unit, Customer and Commercial Services.

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Southern Marsupial Moles are secretive animals covered with dense, silky cream coloured fur that can be stained pinkish or golden brown by the red/orange pigments in the sand. They have many physical attributes that help them to live underground. These include a tubular body with a rear opening pouch (so they don't get dirt in it when digging), vestigial eyes (they don't need them when living underground in the dark), no external ear openings, a hard, protective shield on the nose and scooping claws for digging. Other features include short, powerful limbs and fused neck bones to make their bodies more rigid. They can be up to 16cm long and weigh between 40 and 70g with a tail length up to 2.6cm.

The only other recognised species of marsupial mole is the Northern Marsupial Mole which is slightly larger than the Southern species. Between 1900 and 1920, it is estimated that several thousand marsupial mole pelts were traded by Aboriginal people to Europeans and Afghan cameleers. Scientists are now working with local Aboriginal people to learn about tracking the mole which will help them find out more about their population sizes, movements, diet and life-cycle. Indigenous names for this species include *Itjariitjari* and *Yitjarritjarri*.

Diet

They eat mainly invertebrate larvae and pupae, insects and geckoes. As they get enough moisture from their food they do not need to drink.

Breeding

Little is known about their breeding habits but they are thought to have one to two young that suckle in the pouch after birth. Deep, permanent burrows are built for the young after they leave the pouch.

Habitat

Southern Marsupial Moles are found in the sandy desert regions of Central Australia. Also known as 'blind sand burrowers', their habitat includes dunes, sandy plains and river flats. They need deep, loose sand as they mainly travel underground. While they usually move quite close to the surface, marsupial moles can burrow to depths of around 2.5m.

Threats

Previous hunting greatly reduced the numbers of Southern Marsupial Moles. They are now preyed upon by animals such as foxes, dingoes and cats. Changed fire regimes and grazing animals may have reduced the amount of food they have to eat. Soil compaction by stock movements and vehicles makes it more difficult for these moles to burrow.



Southern Marsupial Moles use their front feet to tunnel sand under their bodies as they move forward and their webbed rear feet to fill it in behind them!

Conservation

You can help the Southern Marsupial Mole by:

- being a responsible pet owner – desex your cats and dogs, keep them inside at night and don't take them into national parks
- telling others about these amazing little creatures.

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