



BIRD

Cacomantis pallidus

Pallid Cuckoo

AUS	SA	AMLR	Endemism	Residency
-	-	V	-	Migratory Breeder



Photo: © Tom & Marie Tarrant (www.aviceda.org)

Conservation Significance

The species is regarded as 'declining' within the AMLR (D. Paton *pers. comm.*). Within the AMLR the species' relative area of occupancy is classified as 'Very Restricted'. Relative to all AMLR extant species, the species' taxonomic uniqueness is classified as 'Very High'.²

Description

Large bird with long tail (Brooker and Brooker 1989). Most distinctive feature is the male's call, a series of notes ascending the scales in semitones of increasing intensity (Shields et al. 1994). Adult males have grey to brown-grey upperparts, dark eye stripe, and grey underparts grading to white on the vent. Tail black-brown with prominent white barring, bill slightly decurved, and together with the smallish head gives a 'hawkish' appearance (Higgins 1999). Females similar to males except darker in general colour, with forehead, crown and nape streaked dark rufous-brown or grey, more prominent dark eye stripe, and darker upper body finely spotted white (Higgins 1999). Juveniles strikingly different to the adults with strong brown and white streaking becoming mottled as they mature (Higgins 1999).^{1,3}

Distribution and Population

Endemic to Australia, but vagrants have been reported in NZ, Timor and New Guinea (Blakers et al. 1984, Shields et al. 1994). Occurs throughout Australia, but records, especially breeding records, above 20°S are less common (Barrett et al. 2003; Blakers et al. 1984). Considered a breeding migrant in the south and absent from TAS during winter (Brooker and Brooker 1989).¹

Once considered ubiquitous in the MLR but less common on Fleurieu Peninsula, where it is now very uncommon. Not listed in the Bird Action Plan (Garnett and Crowley 2000). However, the New Birds Atlas showed a greater than 20% decline in recording rate for the MLR and average recording rates in the region have declined from 42% to only 2% between surveys conducted pre-1980 to post-1995.¹ Most important sub-region for this species is now the spine of the MLR.¹

Post-1983 AMLR filtered records in the northern Adelaide suburbs, the urban coast south of Adelaide, the central MLR from Mount Barker to the Barossa, Monarto and eastern Fleurieu.²

Habitat

Difficult to describe the habitat of a 'parasitic' species as they occupy areas populated by their hosts, which for Pallid Cuckoo is highly variable. As ground foragers that frequently pounce for their food they require open ground, generally using high perches in trees (P. Cale *pers. obs.*). The male frequently calls from a high dead branch, but also from perches such as fence posts in modified landscapes.¹

Within the AMLR the preferred broad vegetation groups are Shrubland, Mallee and Riparian.²

Biology and Ecology

Apart from research on their parasitic behaviour, little detailed information is available about the ecology and biology. Migratory in southern Australia arriving in the MLR around June-July, and leaving around December (Anon 1918, Rix 1976). Home range during the breeding season is poorly understood and nothing is known of the area over which nests are parasitised by an individual female. Use even the smallest remnants (three to five hectares) but may prefer a larger area or even modified habitats. Also use cleared areas and human landscapes such as orchards, vineyards and gardens (Cale 1994, Ford et al. 1995; Shields et al. 1994).¹

Further information:

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Prepared as part of the Regional Recovery Plan for Threatened Species and Ecological Communities of Adelaide and the Mount Lofty Ranges, South Australia 2009 - 2014



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ADELAIDE AND MOUNT LOFTY RANGES SOUTH AUSTRALIA Threatened Species Profile

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Lays eggs in the nests of host species. Thirty-two host species have been recorded including 21 honeyeaters, eight of which are major hosts (Brooker and Brooker 1989). Six of the likely major hosts (honeyeaters) and four other hosts are considered to be in decline in the MLR, suggesting that potential opportunities for Pallid Cuckoos to breed have also declined.¹

Egg laying period is seasonal and not strictly correlated with breeding season of host in a particular region. Therefore, for some species the early or late parts of their breeding season may be free of parasitism by this cuckoo. Breeding in the MLR occurs between August and December, with the peak period September to November. Lays only one egg in a host's nest, probably after the host has commenced laying. The cuckoo may remove an egg when she lays; some species are known to bury cuckoo eggs in the nest lining if they are laid before their own eggs (Brooker and Brooker 1989). Eggs generally hatch in 12-14 days, usually before the hosts' eggs (Shields et al. 1994). Within two to five days of hatching the cuckoo nestling evicts hosts' eggs or nestlings (Brooker and Brooker 1989). Once the nestling has fledged it may be fed for up to six weeks and may be fed by birds other than their foster parents. The fledgling cuckoo may attack nestlings from other nests (Hardy and Hardy 1973; citations in Brooker and Brooker 1989). It is not known how many eggs a female lays in a season.¹

Migratory behaviour suggests ability to travel long distances. In the highly fragmented wheat belt of WA (<7% remnant vegetation) recorded visiting remnants that are 1350 m apart (Cale 1994).¹

Insectivorous, foraging predominantly on the ground by pouncing on insects and their larvae, particularly hairy caterpillars, which are often shunned by other bird species (Anon 1918; Shields et al. 1994; Higgins 1999).¹

Aboriginal Significance

Post-1983 records indicate the AMLR distribution occurs in all Aboriginal Nations - Kurna, Ngadjuri, Nganguraku, Ngarrindjeri and Peramangk.²

Threats

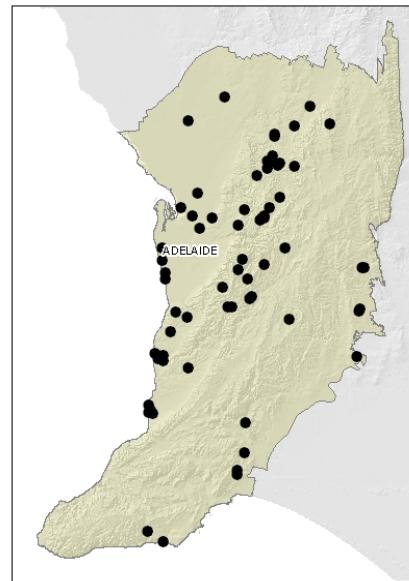
Threats to persistence in the MLR are not well understood but may include:

- vegetation clearance/habitat loss
- habitat fragmentation
- decline of host (nesting) species
- degradation of habitat.¹

Will feed on agricultural land to supplement use of native vegetation. Degradation that reduces diversity and abundance of ground invertebrates (e.g. fire, livestock grazing) or access to the ground (e.g. weed invasion or increased shrub density) will likely have negative effects on the persistence of this species.¹

Additional current direct threats have been identified and rated for this species. Refer to the main plan accompanying these profiles.

Regional Distribution



Map based on filtered post-1983 records.² Note, this map does not necessarily represent the actual species' distribution within the AMLR.

References

Note: In some cases original reference sources are not included in this list, however they can be obtained from the reference from which the information has been sourced (the reference cited in superscript).

- 1 Cale, B. (2005). *Towards a Recovery Plan for the Declining Birds of the Mount Lofty Ranges*. Scientific Resource Document for Birds for Biodiversity. Unpublished Report.
- 2 Department for Environment and Heritage (2007). *Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges Regional Recovery Pilot Project Database*. Unpublished data extracted and edited from BDBSA, SA Herbarium (July 2007) and other sources.
- 3 Reader's Digest (1997). *Reader's Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds*. Reader's Digest (Australia) Pty Ltd.

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