



ADELAIDE AND MOUNT LOFTY RANGES SOUTH AUSTRALIA Threatened Species Profile

Department
for Environment
and Heritage

BIRD

Pachycephala rufiventris rufiventris

Rufous Whistler

AUS	SA	AMLR	Endemism	Residency
-	-	U	-	Resident



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

Conservation Significance

The species has been described as 'probably declining' within the AMLR.¹

Description

Medium sized bird. Sexes differ markedly. Adult male has a white throat-patch edged with black on the neck, black breast-band and rufous underparts. Female grey brown with heavily streaked pale underbelly. Call a series of loud, rapid ringing whistles.¹

Distribution and Population

Distributed throughout mainland Australia and vagrant in TAS. Four subspecies recognised. *Pachycephala rufiventris rufiventris* occurs throughout southern Australia, including the AMLR.¹

Ubiquitous distribution in the AMLR, but appears to have declined substantially on the Adelaide Plains and in the southern agricultural sub-region. Strongholds in the northern agricultural parts of the AMLR, and the eastern flanks sub-regions.¹

Average recording rate across the AMLR region has declined from 53% to 14% for the pre-1980 to post-1995 periods, however, recording rates based on presence/absence data may not be a reliable indicator of status as at least part of the population moves seasonally.¹

Crompton (1915) observed they had 'increased very much' at Stonyfell over the decade up to 1915. Populations varied, but appeared to be maintained at Aldinga Scrub CP up until the mid-1980s (Ashton 1985).¹

Post-1983 AMLR filtered records from across the region, with limited records from the northern Adelaide Plains and suburban Adelaide.²

Habitat

Found in a wide range of vegetation types, excluding rainforest, and tends to favour open Eucalypt forest and woodland (Blakers et al. 1984). In the New England region of NSW, Rufous Whistlers were common in Eucalypt woodland/forest of a wide range of sizes (up to 100 ha), so long as they were not too degraded (Ford et al. 1995). A study of a fragmented landscape in the WA wheatbelt showed it tended to avoid narrow, structurally simple road verges, except where there was suitable habitat adjacent to the road verge (Lynch et al. 1995). Probably favours more open country than the Golden Whistler (*Pachycephala inornata*).¹

Within the AMLR the preferred broad vegetation groups are Grassy Woodland, Heathy Woodland and Mallee.²

Biology and Ecology

Although considered territorial, the period over which it displays this behaviour varies throughout Australia. May remain in the same locality throughout the year or show predictable seasonal movement from a breeding ground to a distant wintering ground, returning within a single year (migratory population). Some populations contain both migrants and residents (partial migratory population) (Chan 2001).¹ In the AMLR at least part of the population shows seasonal movements (Paton et al. 1994). It is unclear whether these movements are local or whether the population is partially migratory.

Both members of a pair, particularly the male, actively defend their all-purpose territory from intruders (Erickson 1951; Bridges 1994b). Males and females perform bowing displays on the boundaries of territories, especially at the start of the breeding season (Erickson 1950, 1951).¹

Adult and sub-adult males defend territories during the breeding season, which average 1.6-1.8 ha in size (NSW study: Bridges 1992, 1994b).¹ In a WA study, the

Further information:

Biodiversity Conservation Unit, Adelaide Region
Phone: (61 8) 8336 0901 Fax: (61 8) 8336 0999
<http://www.environment.sa.gov.au/>

© Department for Environment and Heritage FIS 90346 May 2008

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



Government
of South Australia



ADELAIDE AND MOUNT LOFTY RANGES SOUTH AUSTRALIA Threatened Species Profile

Department
for Environment
and Heritage

territory size ranged from approximately 3.2 - 32 ha (Erickson 1951). Appear to be site tenacious, even when they are seasonal migrants. Migratory birds may return to the same breeding areas and even to the same territories in successive years (Bell and Ford 1987, Bridges 1994b, Leishmann 2000).

Recorded breeding in SA during spring-summer, from August to January with a peak in October-November (Rix 1976, Higgins and Peter 2002). Constructs a loose cup-shaped nest of fine dry sticks, grasses, pieces of bark and rootlets (Beruldsen 2003).¹

Nest as socially monogamous pairs. Clutch size two to three, sometimes four (Bridges 1994a, Higgins and Peter 2002). Both sexes incubate the eggs and brood the young, the female taking the night shift (Erickson 1949, Bridges 1994a, McDonald 2001). Incubation period ranges from 14 to 17 days (Erickson 1949, Bridges 1994a, Higgins and Peter 2002).¹

Insectivorous eating larvae (mainly Lepidoptera and Coleoptera), grasshoppers, moths, butterflies and cicadas (Bridges 1994a).¹ Forages primarily on foliage and bark of Eucalypts and tall shrubs, by snatching. Most foraging is between 6 and 14 m above the ground.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 this species include:

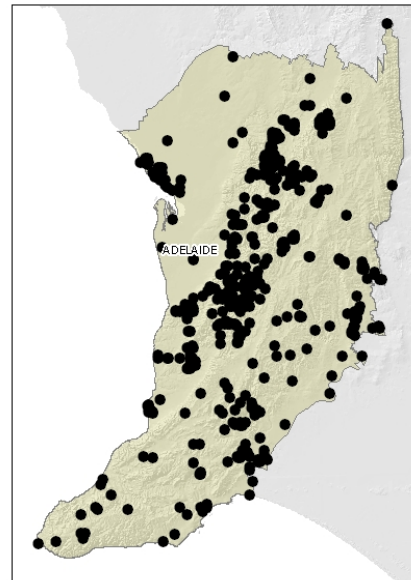
- habitat loss and fragmentation (although preferring larger remnants, e.g. >2200 ha, can survive in smaller, e.g. 2-13 ha); vegetation clearance for residential development in the AMLR is a continuing threat, due to its strong site fidelity (Bell and Ford 1987; Bridges 1994b; Cale 1994; Ford et al. 1995; Leishmann 2000)
- wildfire: response to fire is not well understood but have been found to decline after severe bushfires (e.g. Anstey Hill CP) returning to pre-fire levels within a year (Cale 2005); isolated populations may be at risk of local extinction as a result
- prescribed burns: frequent control burns may affect ability to forage for food, especially if habitat is of limited extent
- weed invasion: appears to prefer more open areas so woody weeds such as Olives are likely to degrade habitat
- pest species: foraging and nesting habits may frequently bring them into contact and conflict

with Noisy Miners

- predation of both eggs and nestlings is a major cause of nest failure (Bridges 1994a).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.

Further information:

Biodiversity Conservation Unit, Adelaide Region

Phone: (61 8) 8336 0901 Fax: (61 8) 8336 0999

<http://www.environment.sa.gov.au/>

© Department for Environment and Heritage FIS 90346 May 2008

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



Government
of South Australia