

Male (left) and female (right)  
Plains-wanderer showing  
difference in colouration  
between the sexes

Saskia Gerhardy

# Fact Sheet

## Plains-wanderer

### GENERAL DESCRIPTION

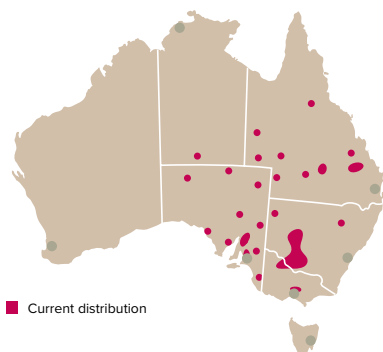
**Plains-wanderers (*Pedionomus torquatus*) are a small ground dwelling bird living in the grasslands of southeastern Australia.**

They were once widespread throughout the lowland native grasslands of coastal and subcoastal eastern Australia. Plains-wanderers are currently nationally listed as critically endangered under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. Until recently there were thought to be fewer than 100 individual Plains-wanderers in South Australia, but recent research is suggesting larger populations may be living further across the State than previously thought.

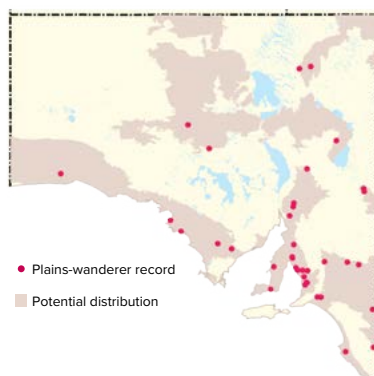
### DISTRIBUTION MAP

The distribution of Plains-wanderer in Australia may appear vast, but this is largely due to the low number of sparse and isolated records that exist. Significant populations are known to occur in Queensland (Diamantina region), NSW (Riverina region), VIC (Riverina region) and recently, in SA (Boolcoommatta Reserve). Despite the low number of sightings and known records in South Australia, much of the state is covered in potential Plains-wanderer habitat and thus, potential distribution. Further research is needed to better understand their distribution and identify localised populations.

#### Distribution across Australia



#### Potential habitat in South Australia



### HABITAT

Plains-wanderers in South Australia have been recorded using a variety of open plains habitat. Vegetation is typically low (10cm), sparse and consists of about 50% bare ground. Species of plants include a variety of saltbush, copperburr (and other *Scelopora* species), native herbs and small tussock grasses.

The ideal vegetation structure recorded at Boolcoommatta Reserve, South Australia was 45–55% vegetation, 50% bare ground, sparse, patchy covering with an average vegetation height between 10–15cm.



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## HOW TO IDENTIFY

Plains-wanderers are small ground dwelling birds that superficially resemble quails. They are 15-19 cm in height and weigh between 40-95 g. Unlike most birds, it is the female who is the larger bird and can be distinguished from males by her black and white speckled collar and red-buff spot on the upper breast. The male in contrast is a much duller bird with brown patterned plumage and can often be half the size of the female. Similar to emus, it is the male who raises the chicks, and is much duller to better camouflage while incubating. Female birds in contrast are much more colourful to help attract a mate.



## POTENTIAL THREATS TO PLAINS-WANDERERS

Predation by cats and foxes, heavy grazing pressure and cereal cropping are thought to be some of the main drivers of decline in Plains-wanderer numbers. However, the planting of denser pasture species and frequent burning also render habitat unsuitable. Some grazing pressure can actually help keep habitat in an ideal condition to support Plains-wanderers. Stock may sometimes trample Plains-wanderer nests and their contents. The restricted and potentially isolated population structure mean prolonged drought and wildfires also pose a significant risk to their longevity. Plague locust spraying can potentially impact on Plains-wanderers directly through poisoning the birds, or indirectly by removing large numbers of insects which is an important element of their diet.

## SIMILAR GROUND DWELLING BIRDS

There are a number of other ground dwelling bird species in Australia and many of the birds can look similar to Plains-wanderer making it difficult to positively ID. When identifying a Plains-wanderer look for features such as the markings, posture, yellow legs, bills, and eyes. Female Plains-wanderers also make a distinctive call, a deep repetitive 'ooming' noise, which can often be heard in the early mornings and late in the evenings.

### Little Button-Quail

Looks very similar to a Plains-wanderer, but has a thicker, browner bill. Males have speckled markings on chest and flank, females are brighter without markings.



### Stubble Quail

Larger and stockier than a Plains-wanderer. Pale body with dark streaks. Male has orange throat contrasting with blackish breast, female plainer in colour.



### Australasian Pipit

Ground dwelling with characteristic tail wag. Plumage is mottled brown, with distinctive white eyebrow. Smaller and thinner than a Plains-wanderer.



## HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Get involved in a new Citizen Science project that will help gather information on this critically endangered bird.

The SA Arid Lands Landscape Board has joined with Bush Heritage Australia and Birdlife Australia to find out more about the Plains-wanderer in a new project *Plains-wanderer: Revisiting the Baseline* which is funded by the Australian Government's Saving Native Species Program.

If you see a Plains-wanderer, we want to hear about it.

You can get involved at [bit.ly/3YJAW52](https://bit.ly/3YJAW52) where you can provide information about the location and a description of where the sighting occurred. This will allow us to follow up with future surveys or monitoring. Photos would also be highly beneficial.

If you have an historical or anecdotal record in South Australia from yourself or a family member, friend or visitor, we would also love to know about it. You can follow the link to let us know the date it was seen, locations, source and degree of confidence on the sighting.



If you have any questions or would prefer to chat to us directly, please contact our office on 8429 9666