

SAVING OUR SPECIES

Grey grasswren

Amytornis barbatus barbatus
Endangered

The grey grasswren is a small elusive pale bird with a very distinctive, striking black-and-white pattern on the head and heavy streaking on the breast.

Generally shy and secretive, when undisturbed, the species may be seen and heard calling, perched atop bushes.

The species is native to the arid channel country of inland Australia, living on the swamp flood-plain of the Bulloo River drainage system in south-western Queensland and north-western New South Wales. The known range in New South Wales is estimated to be less than 100 kilometres x 100 kilometres.

The grey grasswren shelters, roosts, nests and feeds almost entirely within dense, tall lignum (*Muehlenbeckia cunninghamii*), with associated sandhill canegrass (*Zygochloa paradoxa*) and sedges in swamps, overflow channels and flood pans.

This species builds loose and bulky grass nests in the lignum and canegrass, between 30 and 75 centimetres above the ground.

The grey grasswren is a secretive species...the birds can be heard but are difficult to see because they roost, feed and breed all within the dense shrubs and grasses they call home.

The bulk of the grey grasswren diet is comprised of insect larvae, but mature insects and at times, water snails are also eaten.

Although thought to be largely sedentary, and in territorial pairs when breeding, groups of between 15 and 40 individuals forage together outside the breeding season with other movements associated with floods and droughts.

The grey grasswren is now endangered in New South Wales mainly due to destruction of habitat by grazing stock and rabbits. Cattle, particularly in dry years, damage both lignum and canegrass. Rabbits eat the bark of lignum with the resulting ring-barking causing thinning of the lignum stands.



Support local action and help save the grey grasswren



Grey grasswren (*Amytornis barbatus barbatus*) with tracking antenna. Photo: Jeff Hardy/DPIE



Grey grasswren (*Amytornis barbatus barbatus*). Photo: Jeff Hardy/DPIE

Other threats to the species include:

- hydrological changes which have the potential to alter flooding patterns and thus the structure and value of habitat
- predation by foxes and cats
- disturbance of habitat by feral pigs
- uncertainty as to the full distribution of the species' population and its habitat.

Saving our Species (SoS) are working with the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, National Parks and Wildlife Service and a wide range of other organisations and private landowners to save the grey grasswren.

The recovery effort aims to:

- manage feral herbivore species such as rabbits, goats, pigs and horses to reduce total grazing pressure
- develop fire management plans to identify appropriate fire regimes for hazard reduction and the management of wildfires in high-risk locations
- ensure a proportion of grasswren habitat and food resources remain unburned in hazard reduction programs
- encourage property owners to report grey grasswren sightings
- apply appropriate water regulation in wetland habitats

- control vertebrate pest populations (e.g. foxes, cats and rabbits) that either prey on the species or compete for resources
- reduce stock intensity (or exclude/control grazing) to allow regeneration of vegetation for habitat, such as food sources or nest sites
- retain understorey shrubs and allow them to complete their life cycle (i.e. seed set, germination, establishment and growth to maturity)
- prevent clearing of habitat such as nesting sites and food sources
- undertake studies such as trapping and radio-tracking to find out more on the ecology of the species.

You too can help

To support the ongoing success of the recovery of the grey grasswren, look for the species and report any sightings. Within its known range, manage lignum habitat for sustainability.

SoS is a NSW Government flagship program targeting on-ground action to secure threatened plants and animals from extinction. The program aims to increase the number of species that can survive securely in the wild.

SoS can only succeed if we work together. We need your support to ensure that today's actions help to secure the future of NSW's threatened species.

Find out more about threatened species in New South Wales and the SoS program at environment.nsw.gov.au/SOS