

Threatened Species of the South Australian Murray-Darling Basin

Striated Grasswren (sandplain subspecies)

*Amytornis striatus striatus***Vulnerable**

Description and habits

The Striated Grasswren is a small bird clothed in various shades of brown, with white and black striations on its upper parts, and a distinctive black stripe on either side of its throat. It is exceptionally well camouflaged in its mallee habitat, though it often calls attention to itself with its lovely song and quick, scurrying movements. If it senses danger it will vanish into the vegetation and can remain silent and motionless for long periods.

Striated Grasswrens live in pairs, or occasionally groups of three. They have territories of around three hectares and spend most of their time on the ground hopping around to catch insects, patrolling the edges of their territory, or interacting with grasswrens from nearby territories.

A bush choir

As spring approaches, in preparation for the breeding season, the males often congregate where several territories meet and sing for an hour or more to defend their patch. Then in August or September, the female builds a domed nest out of dry grasses and bark, and lines it with fur, soft vegetation or feathers. She lays two or three eggs which hatch after two weeks, and the young leave the nest two weeks later.

Male or female?

The best way to tell male and female Striated Grasswrens apart is the chestnut patch below the wing that only females have, but it's not always easy to see.

What do they need to survive?

The normal habitat of Striated Grasswrens is open mallee over a sparse layer of shrubs and a ground layer dominated by spinifex (*Triodia*), though they are sometimes found in other vegetation types. The spinifex is an important component as it is where they find seeds, insects and spiders to eat, it's where they build their nests, and where they seek shelter.

Striated Grasswrens are apparently able to recolonise burnt areas after about six or seven years and the habitat remains suitable up to around 40 years after fire, when the spinifex deteriorates and the shrub layer starts to die out.

Why are they threatened?

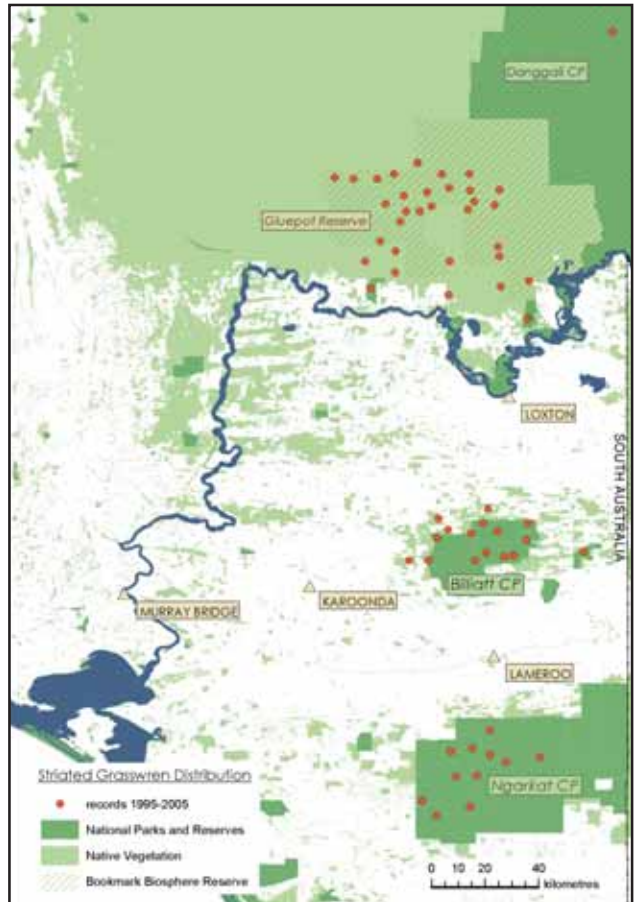
A lot of grasswren habitat was cleared during the last century, which not only greatly reduced their population size, but also left them scattered in isolated remnants across the landscape. These isolated populations face greater risks of decreased genetic health and of being lost to wildfires, as there may be no way for them to move between habitat patches. Fire and drought acting together in a fragmented and degraded landscape are this species' largest threats. Illegal trapping for the aviculture industry is a localised problem and could heavily impact smaller populations.



Striated Grasswren habitat at Cooltong Conservation Park

Where do they occur?

Striated Grasswrens occur throughout a strip of land that stretches north-west to south-east across Australia. Their distribution in the SA Murray-Darling Basin, is shown below. They are relatively common north of the river in Bookmark Biosphere Reserve, where much of the land is recovering from a long history of intensive pastoralism.



Note: points reflect distribution, not abundance and are partly a representation of survey effort across the region.

What are we doing to help?

A regional Recovery Plan is in place for a group of mallee birds, including the Striated Grasswren. A study of its habitat requirements, breeding biology, social organisation and movements is underway and will reveal how we might better manage this species in the long term.

Further information contact

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