

THREATENED SPECIES OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

AUSTRALIAN PAINTED SNIPE

Rostratula australis



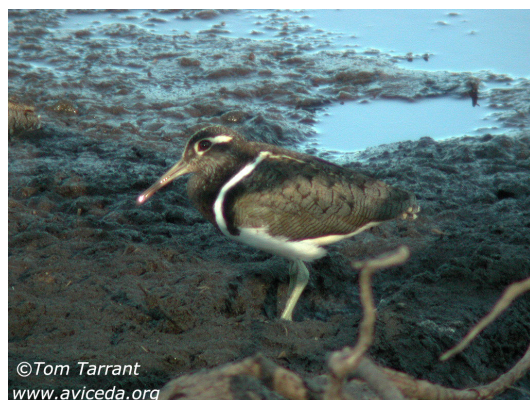
Conservation status

Australia: Vulnerable.

Northern Territory: Vulnerable.

Description

The Australian painted snipe is a wader of around 220-250 mm in length. The head, neck and upper breast is chestnut-bronze. The back and wings are dark olive-green, finely barred black and are ornamented with bright chestnut spots and black bars. The back has a conspicuous buff-coloured V. A broad white band separates the neck and wings. There is a broad white horizontal band through the eye. The male is a smaller, less colourful bird, lacking the rufous on the hindneck. This species is generally inconspicuous, and occurs solitarily or in only small parties.



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Australian painted snipe. (Photo: Tom Tarrant)

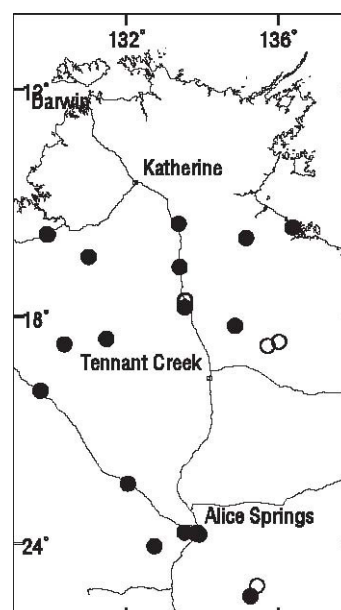
Distribution

Until recently (Lane and Rogers 2000), the Australian painted snipe was generally considered part of a more widespread species that extended throughout Indonesia, Asia and Africa and on many Pacific Islands. As re-defined, the species is now considered restricted to Australia. Australian painted snipe are most frequently recorded in south eastern Australia,

particularly in the Murray-Darling Basin. Records from tropical northern Australia are mostly from Queensland. In northern Western Australia it has been recorded from the Pilbara and Derby but not since 1950 (Blakers *et al.* 1984). In the Northern Territory it was recorded breeding at Tarrabool Lake on Eva Downs on the Barkly Tablelands in 1993 (Jaensch 1994), with non-breeding records from Lake Woods in 1993 and an un-named swamp on Sturt Plateau in 2001 (Jaensch 2003). It is likely that the species could occur on any shallow ephemeral wetlands in central or southern Northern Territory. It is also possible that the species could occur in northern areas of the NT.

Conservation reserves where reported:

None.



Known locations of the Australian painted snipe.

o = pre 1970; • = post 1970



Northern Territory Government

Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts

Ecology

Australian painted snipe occur in shallow, vegetated, freshwater swamps, claypans or inundated grassland (including temporary wetlands). They feed at the water's edge and on mudflats, taking seeds and probing for invertebrates. Three to six eggs are laid in a shallow scrape nest. No sites are known where the species is resident and the species may well be nomadic. Its occurrence appears to be unpredictable (Rogers 2001). It is unobtrusive during the day, feeding primarily at night.



Habitat of the painted snipe at Tarrabool Lake on the Barkly Tablelands. (Source: Jaensch 1994)

Conservation assessment

Australian painted snipe appear to have disappeared from south-western Australia (Johnstone and Storr 1998). The reporting rate for the species has declined steadily since the 1950s (Lane and Rogers 2000) with fewer than 100 records since 1990 (Garnett and Crowley 2000). Garnett and Crowley (2000) classified the status of the species as vulnerable at a national level because of this decline.

Assigning a status for the species in the Northern Territory is more problematic because of lack of knowledge of population size and trends. As it appears to be nomadic, the species is unlikely to have a population that is separate to that inhabiting other areas of Australia. Accordingly, it would mean the species is likely to have declined in the

Territory. This is supported by evidence of a decline in northern Western Australia (Johnstone and Storr 1998). Watkins (1993) estimated that the Australian population was 1,500 individuals, but provided no explanation as to how this was derived. The species qualifies as **Vulnerable** (under criteria A2b; C1) due to:

- population reduction of >30% over the last 10 years or 3 generations; and
- population size less than 10,000 and continuing decline of at least 10% within 10 years or three generations.

Threatening processes

The main process affecting the species in southern areas is wetland drainage. Johnstone and Storr (1980) attribute the decline of painted snipe in the Kimberley to degradation of habitat by cattle. Cattle degrade habitat by trampling and grazing of tussocks. As most NT swamplands suitable for this species occur on pastoral lands, this process may also be detrimentally affecting this species in the NT, although there are no substantial data to assess this impact (Jaensch 2003).

Conservation objectives and management

There is no existing management program for the wild population of this species in the Northern Territory.

Research priorities are to:

- (i) increase surveys of wetlands with specific searches undertaken for painted snipe.

Management priorities are to:

- (i) ensure a range of shallow ephemeral wetlands throughout central and southern Northern Territory are managed to ensure that habitat degradation by cattle does not occur.



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[May 2006]

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