

Grey Grasswren

Amytornis barbatus

The Grey Grasswren (*Amytornis barbatus*) is a small bird found only in floodplain country of the far north-east of South Australia, south-west Queensland and the north-west of New South Wales. The species was described in 1968 from birds collected in the Bulloo River floodplain on the Queensland/New South Wales border. A second population found in South Australia in 1975 was subsequently recognised as a separate subspecies. This Lake Eyre Basin subspecies (*Amytornis barbatus diamantina*) is currently only known from South Australia and Eyre Creek south-west Queensland.

IDENTIFICATION

Like other Grasswren species, Grey Grasswrens are shy, elusive birds that are expert at remaining hidden. They move between dense Lignum clumps without being seen by flying low or running along the ground. Their presence is sometimes only given away by their soft calls – a high pitched 'tsit-tsit' which may resemble a cricket or other insect-like noises.

Grey Grasswrens will very occasionally perch on top of a bush or Lignum clump, allowing a better look. When observed in full view these birds appear quite greyish on their wings and back, with some fine streaking and a pale belly and sides. Their face is white, with a distinctive black pattern through the eye and around the throat. This conspicuous marking has resulted in their specific name of *barbatus* – from Latin, meaning *bearded*.

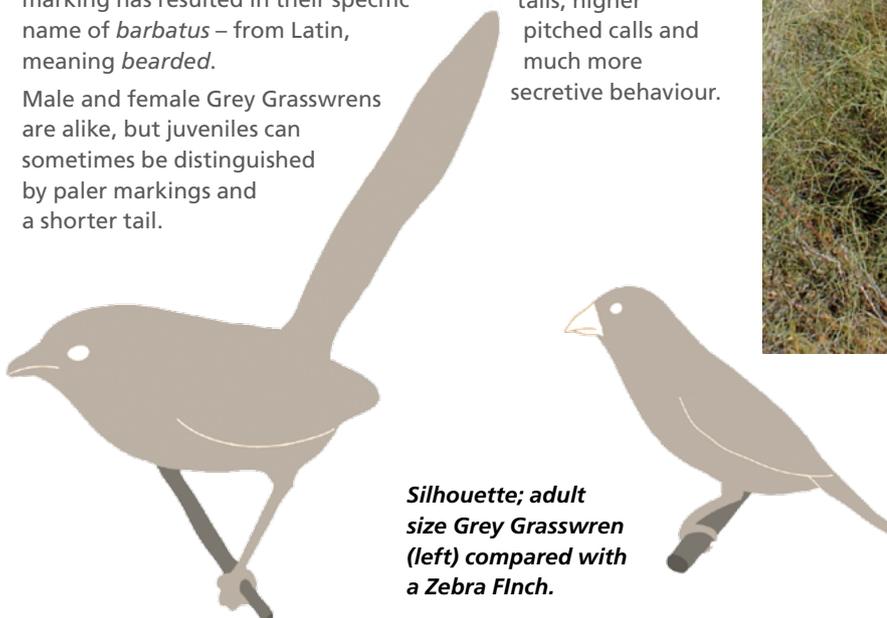
Male and female Grey Grasswrens are alike, but juveniles can sometimes be distinguished by paler markings and a shorter tail.



A close-up of a Grey Grasswren, captured in Lignum floodplain habitat at Goyder's Lagoon, South Australia (below).

Lynn Pedler

Grey Grasswrens can be distinguished from Fairy (Blue) Wrens, which may also inhabit Lignum habitat, by their slightly larger size, facial pattern, conspicuous long tails, higher pitched calls and much more secretive behaviour.



Silhouette; adult size Grey Grasswren (left) compared with a Zebra Finch.

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A Grey Grasswren (left) showing the distinctive facial markings, long tail and larger size than other wrens found in the floodplain, such as the female Variegated Fairywren (right).



Graeme Chapman



Graeme Chapman

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

If you think you have seen a Grey Grasswren within or beyond the locations shown on the distribution map please let us know. Note the location so that your written record can be used to find the same place again. A GPS fix or map reference would be very helpful, as would notes on the habitat or any other relevant information.

HOW CAN YOU CONTACT US?

To report your observation or for further information about Grey Grasswrens contact the Community Fauna Officer, Natural Resources, SA Arid Lands.

RESOURCES

Ehmann, H. (2006). South Australian Rangelands and Aboriginal Lands Wildlife Management Manual: a resource handbook. Dept of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation, South Australia.

HABITAT AND DISTRIBUTION

Since discovery on the Bulloo River Floodplain, the known range of the Grey Grasswren has been extended in South Australia and Queensland. Within South Australia, nearly all sites are within Goyder Lagoon, with several further records of the species in floodplain habitat further downstream in the Warburton Creek floodplain.

There were also reports from a single site in the Cooper Creek system, west of Innamincka in the 1980s. Revisits to this area have failed to confirm this record; however Grey Grasswrens have more recently been recorded further upstream on the Cooper Creek in Queensland. More work is needed to find out whether these birds still inhabit the Cooper Creek system within South Australia.

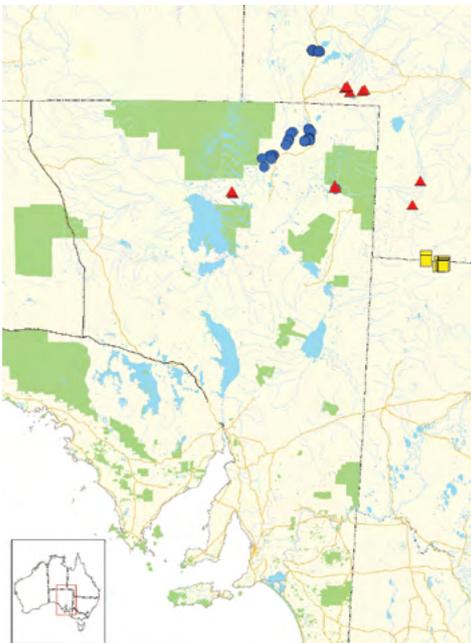
Grey Grasswrens are found throughout the vast floodplains of inland river systems and use areas with thick shrubs such as dense Lignum (*Muehlenbeckia florentia*) clumps or Old Man Saltbush (*Atriplex numularia*) sometimes with an overstorey of Coolibah (*Eucalyptus coolabah*) or River Cooba (*Acacia stenophylla*).

In some areas Grey Grasswrens have been found only in long-unburnt Lignum and not in areas that have been burnt within the previous 5-10 years, suggesting that this regrowth may not be suitable habitat for many years following fires.

POTENTIAL THREATS TO GREY GRASSWREN

The significance of potential threats to the Grey Grasswren requires further investigation. Impacts on vegetation through intensive grazing by domestic stock and introduced herbivores has been determined as a major threat to the species in Queensland and this may also be the case in South Australia. Changed fire regimes in floodplain habitat (either natural or human induced) may also have the potential to significantly impact on Grey Grasswrens, as would future changes in flow frequency of inland rivers as a result of upstream regulation.

Grey Grasswren national distribution showing the Lake Eyre Basin subspecies (blue), the Bulloo River subspecies (yellow) and sub-populations for which the taxonomy is unknown (red).



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Government of South Australia
South Australian Arid Lands Natural Resources Management Board