



STUDENT FACT SHEET

PLAINS WANDERER

Pedionomus torquatus

In South Australia there have been regular sightings of the Plains Wanderer in the north-east pastoral area around Boolcoomata Station, indicating a possible resident population. There are also recent records from near Quorn, Roxby Downs and along the Strzelecki and Birdsville Tracks. However, these inland sightings are likely to be nomadic or migratory individuals or groups.

IDENTIFICATION

Plains Wanderers are extremely reluctant to fly and are therefore difficult to observe. Plains Wanderers are usually seen as single birds, but they may also be seen in pairs and families while breeding. They have a bright yellow bill and legs, and pale brown feathers with small black swirls. Plains Wanderers reach a head to tail length of 15 to 19cm, have a wingspan of 28 to 36cm and weigh 40 to 95 grams.

When disturbed, Plains Wanderers may run for cover, sometimes freezing in an attempt to conceal themselves. If pursued further they may fly up at a steep angle with their

long legs trailing, usually only to a height of three to ten metres. When flying they can be distinguished from quails by their wider wingspan, slower wing beats and a more gradual descent which involves distinct slow flutters without a steep dive.

DISTRIBUTION AND HABITAT

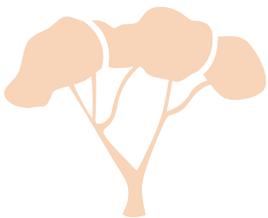
Plains Wanderers are found on wide plains with poor soils, often having many scattered small surface stones. The vegetation is mostly short (5 to 10 cm high), sparse, and widely spaced.

POTENTIAL THREATS TO THE PLAINS WANDERER

Cereal cropping, heavy grazing pressure, and fox and cat predation have caused a decline in plains-wanderers numbers. Stock may sometimes trample Plains Wanderers nests and their contents. Plaque locust spraying can potentially impact on Plains Wanderers directly through poisoning of the birds, or indirectly by removing large numbers of insects which are an important element of their diet.



Australian Government



FOCUS QUESTION

Act out what a property owner would do when spotlighting at night to look for a Plains Wanderer.

Male Plains Wanderer. Photograph by Harald Ehmann.



Plains wanderer habitat. Photograph by Keith Bell-Chambers.





CONTACT US

South Australian Arid
Lands Natural Resources
Management Board

www.saalnrn.sa.gov.au

P. (08) 8648 5977

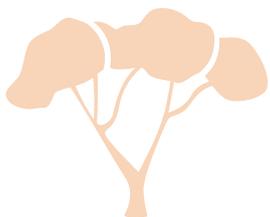
E. [aridlands@saalnrn.
sa.gov.au](mailto:aridlands@saalnrn.sa.gov.au)

FOCUS QUESTION

Come up with a newspaper headline for an article about the Grass Wren and draw a picture of it to accompany the article.



Printed on 100%
Australian recycled paper



EASTERN AND GAWLER RANGES THICK-BILLED GRASS WRENS

Amytornis modestus and *Amytornis textilis myall*

Grasswrens are occasionally seen running, hopping and flying between bushes in parts of South Australia's Rangelands. Two species of Grasswrens are still found in the saltbush country of the rangelands. They are the Eastern Thick-billed and the Gawler Ranges Thick-billed grass wrens.

IDENTIFICATION

Grasswrens are shy, elusive birds that are good at remaining undetected. Their soft, high-pitched calls are often hard to hear. Grasswrens forage for seeds, berries and insects on the ground around bushes. The two Thick-billed Grasswren species are very similar in appearance, with dull greyish-brown feathers with fine, dark-edged whitish streaks and paler belly, throat and chest.



Eastern Thick-billed Grasswren perched on bluebush.
Photograph by Lynn Pedler.

HABITAT AND DISTRIBUTION

Grasswrens live only in the thickest bushes of the saltbush shrublands, mostly in lower lying

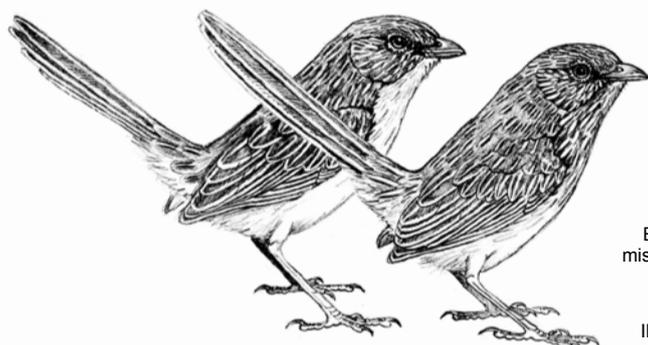
areas such as watercourses and drainage lines in vegetation surrounding dams. The Gawler Ranges Thick-billed Grasswren is found in the Whyalla – Middleback - Gawler Ranges region. The Eastern Thick-billed Grasswren is present in the lower basins of the Lake Eyre, Torrens and Frome.



Gawler Ranges Thick-billed Grasswren.
Photograph by Lynn Pedler.

POTENTIAL THREATS TO THICK-BILLED GRASS WRENS

The Eastern Thick-billed Grasswren has totally disappeared from New South Wales and is declining in the Northern Territory (Garnett and Crowley, 2000). It is believed that this decline has been caused by a combination of predation by introduced cats and foxes, and from habitat modification caused by rabbits and stock grazing (Garnett and Crowley, 2000).



« This study is focused on sightings of the Eastern Thick-billed Grasswrens (far left) and the Gawler Ranges Thick-billed Grasswren.

Birds that are most likely to be mistaken for Grasswrens include the Fairywrens and Rufous Fieldwrens (far right).

Illustrations by Peter Langdon.

