Subspecies Conservation Summary

**Thick-billed Grasswren (north-west New South Wales)**

*Amytornis modestus obscurior* (Mathews, 1923)
*Maluridae*

**Conservation status**
Critically Endangered D

**Reasons for listing**
The known population of this subspecies was only about 10 adults at the time of assessment

**Status 2000**
Critically Endangered D

**Status 1990**
Critically Endangered D

**Taxonomy**
*A. m. modestus* (MacDonnell Ranges) and *A. m. inexpectatus* (central NSW) are Extinct, *A. m. raglessi* (Flinders Ranges) is Vulnerable, *A. m. curnamona* (Lake Frome Basin) is Near Threatened, *A. m. indulkanna* (western) is Least Concern, as is the species.

**Range**
Specimens collected in 1912 near Milparinka, north of Broken Hill (McAllan 1987) and a clutch of eggs collected north-east of Tibooburra near the Queensland border in 1936 (Black and Longmore 2009). A population was re-discovered in 2008 near Packsaddle, east of the Milparinka record (Parker et al. 2010).

**Abundance**
The population is very small. Up to 10 adult birds were seen in 2008–2010 (Black 2011). It is assessed here as having a stable population, since any decline would have caused its extinction. As it is, any evidence of a continuing decline would qualify it as Critically Endangered under the additional criteria B1ab+2ab, C2a(ii).

**Ecology**
The existing birds were recorded on a low ridgeline covered with gibber, with scattered Blackbush *Maireana pyramidata* and Thorny Saltbush *Ragodia spinescens* the dominant vegetation as well as scattered trees and taller shrubs (Parker et al. 2010). Other Thick-billed Grasswren subspecies inhabit chenopod shrublands, particularly those dominated by saltbush *Atriplex* spp. and bluebush *Maireana* spp. They forage on the ground for berries, seeds and insects (Rowley and Russell 1997). They lay 2–3 eggs in domed or cup nests built in shrubs (Rowley and Russell 1997). A generation time of 9.7 years (BirdLife International 2011) is derived from an age at first breeding of 2.3 years and a maximum longevity of 17.0 years, both values extrapolated from fairy-wrens *Malurus* spp.

**Threats**
Overgrazing by sheep, cattle, feral goats *Hircus capra* and rabbits *Oryctolagus cuniculus*, particularly in combination with drought, is thought to be the main threat, and is already thought to have caused the extinction of *A. m. inexpectatus*. Although Blackbush and similar shrubs are resilient and long-lived, recruitment is infrequent and their seedlings are highly palatable to stock (Crisp 1978; Tiver and Andrew 1997). Predation by foxes *Vulpes vulpes* may be significant and intensive fox baiting may underlie recent increases in *A. m. curnamona* on the north Olary Plains (Pedler et al. 2007).

**Conservation objectives**
1. Viable population size
2. Expanded area of occupancy

**Information required**
1. All individuals located in intensive surveys of nearby potential habitat
2. Status assessed across historical and potential new locations
3. Optimal levels of grazing by livestock and feral mammals assessed
4. Impacts of predation by foxes

**Management actions required**
1. Ensure grazing by stock is kept at very low levels until the relationship between grazing and grasswren abundance is better understood

**Bibliography**


**Comments received from**

Andrew Black, Graham Carpenter, Lynn Pedler, Ian McAllan

**Current eligibility against IUCN Red List Criteria**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IUCN category</th>
<th>Criteria eligibility</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Not applicable: past, current or future population declines are thought unlikely to exceed 20% in any 3-generation period</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Not applicable: EOO, AOO, habitat, locations or population not thought to be declining, population fluctuations not extreme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Not applicable: no continuing population decline or extreme fluctuations</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Critically Endangered: population &lt;50 mature individuals</td>
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<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Not applicable: no population viability analysis undertaken</td>
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**IUCN Red List assessment data**

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Estimate</th>
<th>Reliability</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extent of occurrence</td>
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<td>Area of occupancy</td>
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<tr>
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