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# Shark Bay World Heritage Notes



ENVIRONMENT AND CONSERVATION DISTRICT OFFICE, DENHAM, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

## THICK-BILLED GRASSWREN

The thick-billed grasswren (*Amytornis textilis*) a small bird that was once found across the southern arid zone from Shark Bay to western New South Wales, has declined dramatically since the turn of the century. Today, three subspecies remain, but they are confined to very small areas, including Shark Bay.

One subspecies occurs in the Lake Eyre, Lake Torrens and Lake Frome basins and another is restricted to South Australia's northern Eyre Peninsula, the third is only known definitely from Shark Bay. They can be seen on Peron Peninsula, particularly at Monkey Mia and south and east of Hamelin Pool, but they have disappeared from Dirk Hartog Island.

The thick-billed grasswren's plumage is earthy brown, with fine white streaks, and the birds have long tails which are held erect. They are slightly larger at 15 to 20cm than the better known splendid fairy-wren. They eat seeds, vegetable matter and some insects, but eat more seeds than other grasswrens which probably explains why they have heavier bills than other species of wren.

Thick-billed grasswrens breed in late winter, usually laying two eggs in a roughly hooded, cup-shaped nest made of dry grass, twigs and narrow strips of bark. The nests are well hidden in low thick bush near the ground.

Grasswrens are secretive and difficult to observe, but can sometimes be seen perched on exposed branches, often they are only glimpsed as they hold their head low and dart in a half run, half flight blurr from one patch of cover to the next.

The thick-billed grasswren is one of two bird species found in Shark Bay that are declared threatened and in need of special protection. The other is the black and white fairy wren which is found only on Dirk Hartog Island.



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