



ENDANGERED!



WESTERN GROUND PARROT

There are probably only about 250 western ground parrots in existence—and the number is most likely decreasing.

The western ground parrot is an unusual parrot, a very secretive bird that spends most of its life on the ground, where it feeds, rests and nests in near-coastal heathlands. It spends most of the day walking through heathland up to about half-a-metre tall, feeding on seeds or, in the hotter part of the day, resting on or near the ground. It is not often seen—you have to walk a long way through heathland before you are likely to flush one.

Ground parrots very rarely call during the day—if you want to hear one, you have to be out on the heath an hour before dawn, or half-an-hour after sunset. They don't finish calling until after the stars are out. Listening for calls is the best way to detect the presence of ground parrots, hence it is the basis for census and survey methods.

In the past, destruction of habitat

was a major threat and the species became confined to Cape Arid National Park, Fitzgerald River National Park and the Waychiricup-Manypeaks area. Clearing for agriculture and other purposes no longer threatens known populations—extensive wildfire is now the greatest threat to ground parrot habitat. In dry parts of its range, such as in the northern part of Fitzgerald River National Park, the species can recolonise a burnt area within about six years of a fire, and this time is likely to be less in wetter areas. However, the 90,000-hectare fire in Fitzgerald River National Park in 1999 burnt about half of the ground parrot habitat in the park. As a result, up to a quarter of the total population may have been lost in this one fire. The good news is that one of the remaining populations has been showing strong growth.

On the other hand, recent fires in Cape Arid National Park burnt almost

by Allan Burbidge & Sarah Comer

Photos by Allan Burbidge

all the available habitat in the park. And at Manypeaks, recent survey work, carried out by volunteers and coordinated by Birds Australia, suggests that the population there is very small and decreasing. Any further extensive wildfires in Fitzgerald River National Park could, therefore, be catastrophic for the ground parrot.

The western ground parrot is currently classified as Endangered, but the results of these recent surveys suggest that it is Critically Endangered.

Because the ground parrot is so difficult to detect, it is possible that hitherto unknown populations still exist on the south coast. However, the methods of survey (we've mentioned before dawn and after dusk!) restrict the area that can be covered with a small number of people. We are, therefore, appealing to anyone with either knowledge of any records of these birds or an interest in participating in volunteer surveys on the south coast to contact us.

Winner of the 1998 Alex Harris Medal for excellence in science and environment reporting.

LANDSCOPE



VOLUME EIGHTEEN, NUMBER 3, AUTUMN 2003



Cane toads are poisonous, prolific breeders and are getting closer to the WA border. Hop to page 10.

Once thought to be extinct, Gilbert's potoroo has overcome many obstacles. What is being done to improve its chances of survival? See page 28.



The tuart once typified the coastal strip north and south of Perth. Why should we cherish this majestic tree? See page 16.



Discover some of the prehistoric megafauna that once roamed the State in 'Walking with WA giants' on page 23.



Lichens decorate Lake Muir, near Manjimup, with varying colours and shapes. Turn to page 43 to learn more about these fascinating life forms.

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Colour Separation by Colourbox Digital.

Printed in Western Australia by Lamb Print.

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Visit NatureBase at www.naturebase.net

Published by the Department of Conservation and Land Management, Dick Perry Avenue, Kensington, Western Australia.

COVER

Royal hakea rises above the surrounding heath, straight and column-like. When sunlit from above or below, its unusual large variegated leaves appear to glow like lanterns, so the shrub is also known as the Chinese lantern bush. Among the birds that obtain nectar from its flowers (hidden at the base of the leaves) is the western spinebill.

Royal hakea grows almost exclusively in Fitzgerald River National Park, an area that was reserved on the recommendation of then Government Botanist Charles Gardner (see 'Botanic Guardian' on page 36).

Cover illustration by Philippa Nikulinsky



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