
The National Threatened Species Network

by *Jean-Paul Orsini*

WA Coordinator NTSN

The National Threatened Species Network (NTSN) is a non-government community-based network promoting the conservation and recovery of endangered species and their habitat in Australia. It is a component of the federal Endangered Species Program (ESP), is administered by the Australian Nature Conservation Agency (ANCA) and World Wide Fund for Nature Australia (WWF), and is represented by a co-ordinator in each state and the Northern Territory. The NTSN supports community education and participation on endangered species conservation and provides an important information resource to a wide range of individuals and conservation groups.

Since its establishment three and half years ago, the Western Australian NTSN has developed regular exchanges with over 220 community groups, research bodies and government agencies throughout the state and around Australia. Its mailing list numbers over 500. The WA-NTSN makes submission on state and national strategies, management plans and legislation. It provides community input to government on endangered species-related issues and feeds back information to the community (such as the progress of recovery plans and the new Commonwealth Endangered Species Protection Act).

Over the last eighteen months, the WA-NTSN has developed a community-based conservation project for the endangered Malleefowl in Western Australia. The Malleefowl Preservation Group was established in June 1992 and has grown to 200 supporters throughout the South-West. A three-year project funded under the National Landcare Program has been initiated and a part-time Project Officer has just been appointed. A Community Action Plan and a Research Plan for Malleefowl conservation in the Gnowangerup district have been produced recently. Active involvement is spreading in other areas of the wheatbelt with the support of local Land Conservation District Committees.

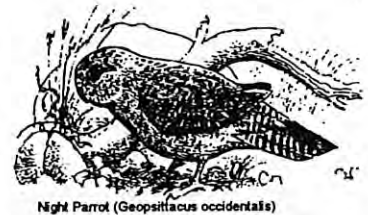
In 1994, the NTSN will be promoting increased community input and involvement in the recovery of Western Australian threatened species and

communities. The NTSN produces a national newsletter called "The Web" and a WA newsletter called "Wanted alive". For more information on the National Threatened Species Network in Western Australia, please contact Jean-Paul Orsini, WA co-ordinator, on (09) 384 3756.

THE NIGHT PARROT: NO LONGER "PRESUMED EXTINCT"

by *John Blyth*

The Night Parrot (*Geopsittacus occidentalis*), is listed as a



Night Parrot (*Geopsittacus occidentalis*)

threatened species in Western Australia under the Wildlife Conservation Act. A recently developed procedure for ranking threatened species suggests that the Night Parrot should be ranked as Critical and probably given the highest priority for recovery action of any Western Australian bird - if we knew enough about its distribution, movements and ecology to produce such a plan!

Amongst professional ornithologists and amateur birdwatchers alike few birds excite more interest than the Night Parrot. Before the turn of the century many reports (but only 23 specimens) came from a vast area of arid Australia, with records from every mainland State. There seems little doubt that the bird has undergone a considerable decline in numbers and/or range since that time. Nevertheless, there have still been many reports of sightings, of variable credibility.

Historically, collected specimens and most sight records have come from four large but widely separated areas: the Gawler Ranges in central South Australia; far north to north eastern South Australia and adjoining areas of western Queensland and southern Northern Territory; around the junction of the boundaries of South Australia, New South Wales and Victoria; and central Western Australia, especially in the north eastern Gascoyne. Glenn Storr also recorded several unconfirmed sightings from arid parts of the Kimberley.

The most widely accepted recent sight-record was of four birds in salt lake country in far north-eastern South Australia in 1979 by the late Shane

Parker, then Curator of Ornithology at the South Australian Museum. The first confirmed record for over 80 years was a roadkilled specimen collected near Boulia in northwestern Queensland in 1990. Coincidentally, there had been a growing number of unconfirmed reports from the Mount Isa-Cloncurry region inland from the Gulf of Carpentaria, about 150 km north of Boulia, over the last fifteen or so years.

A very recent paper in the journal *Emu* describes seven separate sightings of Night Parrots in a relatively small area of the Mount Isa uplands south of Cloncurry, during the period from March 1992 to June 1993. The senior authors, Stephen Garnett and Gabriel Crowley, (currently implementing a recovery plan for the Golden-shouldered Parrot, *Psephotus chrysopterygius*) have examined all of the sites where their co-authors claim to have seen Night Parrots. Although no single plant species, soil type or other characteristic was present at all sites, most observations were at sites which had combinations of gravelly surfaces, the presence within a few hundred metres of well grown spinifex (*Triodia molesta*), and free water available within a kilometre or so. The sightings were also consistent with the idea that Night Parrots are definitely nocturnal (even though they show no obvious physical adaptations to such a lifestyle) and suggested that they may be active throughout the night.

Stephen Garnett has also recently written a draft research plan for the Night Parrot, for the Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage. Initially, the intention is to focus on the area of the Mount Isa uplands around where the above sightings have been made. In March 1994, they intend to begin to test various methods of searching for Night Parrots, to find a reliable way of establishing their presence in an area, and then to use these methods to establish the extent of the population and to begin a monitoring program. Once more information about the local distribution, movements and habitat preferences of the species has been obtained, a detailed ecological study could begin with the aim of providing the basis for conservation management.

Historically it has been assumed that the Night Parrot is probably a highly nomadic species, moving widely about the arid zone to find suitable habitat. Shane Parker and others have suggested that there may be a more or less seasonal movement from spinifex grasslands, once the seed resource is depleted, to the samphire flats of salt lakes. Because of the assumption of nomadism, it

has also often been assumed that it would be extremely difficult to develop management plans for the species.

Assumptions of highly nomadic behaviour have also been made over the years about two other little-known parrots of the arid zone, the Princess Parrot, *Polytelis alexandrae*, and the Scarlet-chested Parrot, *Neophema splendida*. Recent evidence is starting to suggest that there are areas where these species can be found from year to year, and where at least some proportion of the population appears to be resident. In very good years the two species may expand their range greatly and in drier conditions may shrink back to the relatively limited places which act as refuges.

As for Princess and Scarlet-chested Parrots, the types of habitats in which Night Parrots have been recorded appear to be wide spread across arid Australia. Nevertheless, in the light of the comparative concentration of historical sightings, and the many recent reports, over several years, coming from a quite restricted area of north-western Queensland, it seems possible that the Night Parrot may also have key areas on which its populations depend (and where any necessary management, such as predator control, should be concentrated).

A reading of both very old and very new literature on the Night Parrot suggests that one cannot just expect to obtain chance sightings of the species by being in the right place at the right time. This is a small, cryptically coloured and secretive bird which appears to be genuinely nocturnal and to hide almost totally, in either dense spinifex or samphire, during the daylight hours. (Although the Garnett *et al.* paper referred to above includes one sighting of two birds in a low bush just before sundown.) Thus, deliberate searching, especially by spotlight at night, is likely to be needed if attempting to determine whether or not the Night Parrot occurs in a particular area. Daytime sightings have almost always involved birds flushed, from spinifex or samphire, by chance or deliberately through a beating process.

Western Australia does not have the advantage of an accumulation of recent sightings from a specific area. Nevertheless, a logical first step towards developing a recovery plan for the species in Western Australia would be concentrating search efforts on those areas which appear to have the right combination of habitat features now and be in the same general area as historical sightings. A good starting point would be the north-east Gascoyne and adjacent areas, inland to the

proposed Carnarvon Range National Park and areas south and south west of it, down to Lakes Nabberu, King and Gregory.

In the near future WATSCU is hoping to begin a few preliminary steps, at low cost, towards finding out whether, and where, populations of Night Parrots still exist in Western Australia.

R&I LANDSCOPE CONSERVATION VISA CARD

The R&I LANDSCOPE Conservation Visa card was launched on 7 June 1993 by the R&I Bank. Every time the card is used a percentage of the transaction goes towards an Endangered Species Conservation Trust Fund set up by the bank.

So far there has been a strong response from the public and there is a likelihood that over 4,000 cards will be issued by June this year. The R&I Bank made an additional payment to the Trust Fund of \$1,000 to recognise the issue of the first 1000 cards.

The species that will benefit first from the funds are the Corrigin grevillea, the Wyalkatchem foxglove, the western ringtail possum, the Lancelin Island Skink and one threatened ecological community - Lake Toolibin, a freshwater wetland to the east of the town of Narrogin.



APPLICATIONS FOR ANCA ENDANGERED SPECIES PROGRAM FUNDING 1994/95

ANCA has advised that the closing date for this program (and other ANCA funding programs) has been put forward to 30 April.

This year, applications will be dealt with in a two phase process:

Phase 1 - An outline of your application containing a summary of the proposal and a budget is to be lodged with WATSCU **by 18 March 1994**. (No late applications accepted!) The applications will then be reviewed and ranked by a committee.

Phase 2 - The applications which have been accepted by the committee are then to be transposed into a detailed application which is then to be lodged with Andrew Burbidge by **15 April 1994** for approval by the relevant Directors before forwarding to Canberra.

Application guidelines have been sent out to CALM staff and WATSCU Associates.

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