

FAUNA

WESTERN GROUND PARROT

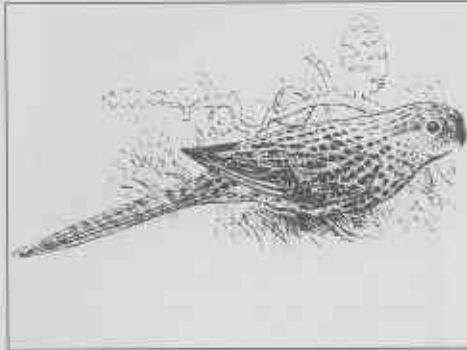
Brenda Newbey

ONE of the least known birds of southern Western Australia is the Western Ground Parrot. It is the rarest of three subspecies of ground parrot and the only one that occurs in Western Australia. There are several good reasons for its low profile.

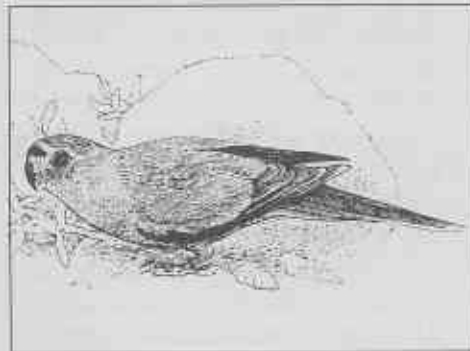
Typically it lives in low heathland with the densest stratum less than half a metre tall. Although its call is distinctive, it rarely calls throughout the day. The most reliable calling times are after sunset and before sunrise. It flies well but only when disturbed in the daytime. Otherwise flights of a few hundred metres between roosting and feeding sites are pre-dawn and dusk, as for calling. Nevertheless it is active in daylight hours, moving about on foot to feed on the many easy-to-reach plants. It has longer legs than most parrots and walks without the rolling gait that other parrots have.

Another major reason for its low profile is that it is extremely scarce. The range was probably almost continuous near the coast from Israelite Bay to Dongara before the fire regimes and the fragmentation that began in 1800s and the arrival of the cat and fox. It is now known from only three separate areas - near Cheyne Beach and Mount Manypeaks, in the Fitzgerald River National Park, and in the Cape Arid National Park where a small number were found in May this year after failure to find any there in searches between 1990 and 2000. That is the good news. The bad news is that the Waychinicup -Manypeaks population appears to be shrinking.

There could be Western Ground Parrots on privately owned heathland along the south coast. Dispersing birds may fly over 100 km. Fire-age related to rate of growth (rainfall) matters, as the birds need



Western Ground parrot



Rock Parrot

cover and food within vegetation that is up to half a metre above the ground. They will at times use vegetation that later grows too tall. They are able to use vegetation of a younger fire-age if older suitable heathland is adjacent. Swamps are optional habitat requirements but sedges form an important part of the birds' diet.

It is not uncommon for people to report seeing a flock of 'ground parrots' on dunes or beaches of the south coast. These certainly occur in flocks on the ground but are Rock Parrots. The Western Ground Parrot is of similar size but it is unlikely that more than two would be seen together. Rock Parrots when disturbed will often fly high; a Ground Parrot will fly just above the low vegetation, soon dropping down into the vegetation again. Both birds could basically be described

as 'green' but there are many plumage differences. For example the Ground Parrot has conspicuous brown or black barring on many of its feathers; the Rock Parrot is plain.

In January this year due to concern about the status of the Western Ground Parrot, its low profile and the uncertainty of its short-term survival, the community group, Friends of the Western Ground Parrot, was revived. Members receive information about the parrot and related projects past and future. There are lots of things happening this spring! If you can, please help! The goal is to see the numbers of birds increase so that it is no longer at such risk.

For more information about the bird or the group contact Brenda Newbey 93375673; e-mail sfryc@iinet.net.au or Anne Bondin e-mail albanybirds@hotmail.com

Stop Press: partly due to the note about this new group in Western Wildlife in April this year, a possible sighting has been recorded at Hill River in the West Midlands. If confirmed, this would be of enormous significance, as it is within the historical range of the species, but was thought to be extinct there.

If you have the opportunity to do any Ground Parrot surveying especially between Cervantes and Jurien it would be well worthwhile. It would be very useful if it could be recorded on the WGP survey form. A survey form can be sent to you by Brenda Newbey or go to Birds Australia WA website at <http://birdswa.iinet.net.au> and then access projects, Western Ground Parrot.