

# Threatened species of the Northern Territory

## Carpentarian grasswren

*Amytornis dorotheae*

### Conservation status

#### Australia: Endangered

Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999

#### Northern Territory: Endangered

Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1976



Credit: S. Murphy

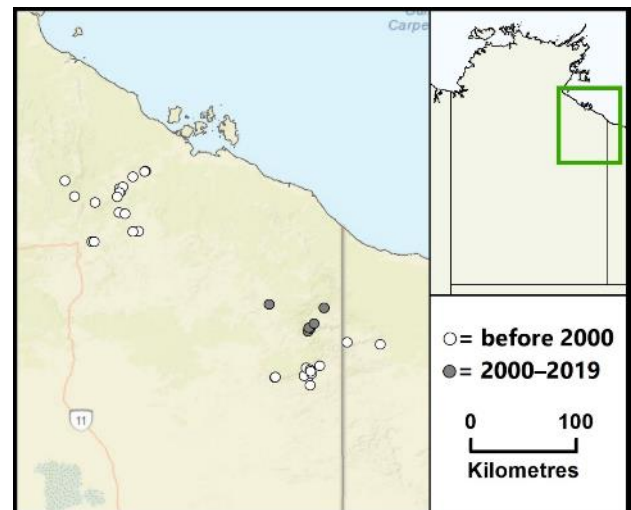
### Description

The Carpentarian Grasswren is a medium-sized grasswren with a slender body and rusty-coloured back. The face is streaked black and white and is separated from the white throat by a black moustachial stripe. The crown, nape and back are streaked by white feather shafts. The tail is rusty grey and usually held upright. The flanks, thighs and lower belly of males are tawny, while those of females are chestnut.

### Distribution

The Carpentarian Grasswren has a restricted and disjunct distribution, being found only on sandstone outcrops within the Carpentarian and Adelaidean Systems of the Gulf of Carpentaria. Records of Carpentarian Grasswrens have been collected from Limmen National Park in the Northern Territory (NT) southeast to Westmoreland Station in Queensland<sup>1</sup>.

NT conservation reserves where reported:  
Caranbirini Conservation Reserve and Limmen National Park.



Caption: Known localities of the Carpentarian Grasswren in the NT ([nrmmaps.nt.gov.au](http://nrmmaps.nt.gov.au))

### Ecology and life-history

The ecology of the Carpentarian Grasswren is not well understood. The species is known to occur in habitats with mature stands of Soft Spinifex *Triodia pungens* on sandstone outcrops containing large boulders. Carpentarian Grasswrens normally abandon burnt areas, unless substantial unburnt pockets of spinifex remain nearby<sup>1</sup>.

Carpentarian Grasswrens construct a nest within spinifex clumps during the wet season. Clutch size appears to be 2–3 eggs and young are fed on a variety of seeds and insects.

## Threatening processes

Fire is currently thought to be the primary factor influencing the distribution and abundance of the Carpentarian Grasswren. The species not only uses unburnt patches of Soft Spinifex as habitat but also feeds on the seeds of this species. A history of annual dry season fires can result in lower seed availability from Soft Spinifex<sup>2</sup>. Annual fires can therefore reduce both food availability and habitat suitability for Carpentarian Grasswrens and result in the species' decline. Indeed, fire caused the extirpation of the Borroloola subpopulation in the NT, has greatly reduced two other subpopulations, and was probably responsible for the historical separation of the species into discrete localities<sup>1</sup>.

## Conservation objectives and management

Research priorities for the Carpentarian Grasswren are to: i) monitor the number of individuals at different localities; and ii) implement a detailed study of the biology of the species.

The primary management priority for the species is to improve current burning practises, by reducing the extent and incidence of hot fires late in the dry season, and introduce a balanced mosaic of burns.

## References

<sup>1</sup> Garnett, S.T., Szabo, J.K., Dutson, G., 2011. The Action Plan for Australian Birds. 2011. CSIRO Publishing/Birds Australia, Melbourne.

<sup>2</sup> M. Lewis personal communication

<sup>3</sup> McKean, J.L., Martin, K.C., 1989. Distribution and status of the Carpentarian Grass-wren *Amytornis dorotheae*. North. Territ. Nat. 11, 12–19.

<sup>4</sup> Perry, J., 2005. Habitat and status of the Carpentarian Grasswren (*Amytornis dorotheae*) in the Northern Territory. B.App.Sci. thesis. Charles Darwin University, Darwin.