

Threatened species of the Northern Territory

Hooded robin (Tiwi)

Melanodryas cucullata melvillensis

Conservation status

Australia: Critically Endangered

Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999

Northern Territory: Critically Endangered

Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1976



Credit: D. Portelli

Description

The Hooded Robin is a small bird with a round head and plump body. The male is distinctive, with a black head and back, white breast and belly, and black and white wings and tail. The female is pale grey below and darker grey above, but has similarly bold wing and tail patterns.

The Hooded Robin (Tiwi) is very similar to the three other recognised subspecies, but it is generally smaller and has a proportionally longer bill¹.

Distribution

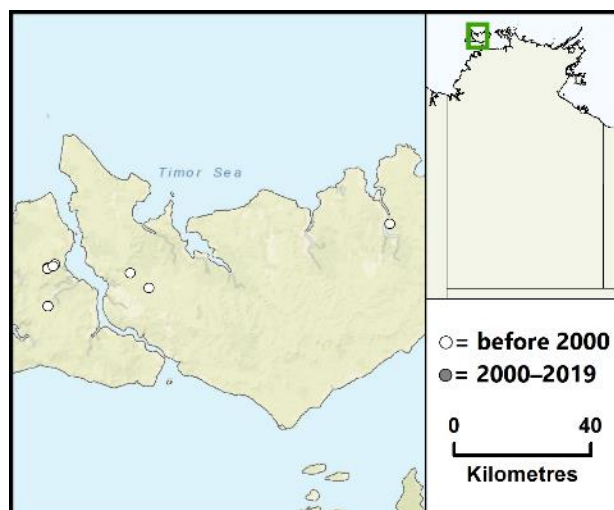
The Hooded Robin is distributed across much of mainland Australia, however the Hooded Robin (Tiwi) occurs only on the Tiwi Islands. There are very few records of the subspecies. Specimens were first collected from Bathurst and Melville Islands in 1913²⁻³, and the last reported sightings were made in December 1991–January 1992 at one site on each island⁴.

NT conservation reserves where reported: None.

Ecology and life-history

Very little is known about the ecology and life-history of the Hooded Robin (Tiwi), except that it has been observed in tall open eucalypt forests, treeless plains and *Acacia* shrublands.

On the mainland, Hooded Robins occur singly, in pairs or in small family groups. They typically forage by perching quietly on tree branches, trunks or shrubs and suddenly pouncing on invertebrate prey sighted on the ground.



Caption: Known localities of the Hooded Robin (Tiwi) in the NT (nrmmaps.nt.gov.au)

Such a foraging technique is most successful where there is sparse or low vegetative cover; consequently, the species does not occur in savanna woodlands with dense grassy understoreys.

Threatening processes

There is no detailed information on threats that may have contributed to the apparent decline of the Hooded Robin (Tiwi). Nonetheless, the most likely was a dramatic change to the fire regime, from an intricate fine-scale mosaic imposed by Aboriginal management to a more polarised regime, characterised by more widespread and intense fires in more accessible areas, and a low fire frequency in more remote areas⁵. In particular, a low fire frequency leads to denser grass cover, which likely disadvantages the Hooded Robin (Tiwi) through reducing foraging efficiency. In more recent times, habitat loss associated with the conversion of 26,000 ha of eucalypt tall open forests to exotic plantations in 2002–2007 possibly had a detrimental affect on the subspecies.

Conservation objectives and management

Research and management priorities: to determine if the Hooded Robin (Tiwi) is extant; if so, determine population size, distribution, habitat relationships and threats (especially relationship to fire) if the subspecies persist,

References

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- ² Zietz, F.R., 1914. The avifauna of Melville Island, Northern Territory. South Aust. Ornithol. 1, 11–18.
- ³ Mathews, G.M., 1914. A list of the birds of Melville Island, Northern Territory, Australia. Ibis 2, 91–132.
- ⁴ Fensham, R.J., Woinarski, J.C.Z., 1992. Yawulama: the ecology and conservation of monsoon forest on the Tiwi Islands, Northern Territory. Report to DASET. Conservation Commission of the Northern Territory, Darwin.
- ⁵ Woinarski, J., Brennan, K., Firth, R., Watt, F., 2000. Biodiversity conservation on the Tiwi islands: plants,

vegetation types and terrestrial vertebrates on Melville Island. Report to Tiwi Land Council, Darwin.

⁶ Woinarski, J., Brennan, K., Hempel, C., Armstrong, M., Milne, D., Chatto, R., 2003. Biodiversity conservation on the Tiwi islands, Northern Territory. Part 2, 127. Department of Infrastructure Planning and Environment, Darwin.

⁷ Garnett, S.T., Szabo, J.K., Dutson, G., 2011. The action plan for Australian Birds 2010. CSIRO Publishing/Birds Australia, Melbourne.