

# Threatened species of the Northern Territory

## Night parrot

### *Pezoporus occidentalis*

#### Conservation status

##### Australia: Endangered

Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999

##### Northern Territory: Endangered

Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1976

## Description

The Night Parrot is a medium-sized bird, 22–25 cm long, with a stocky build and a noticeably short tail. The head, upperparts and breast are bright green with blackish and yellow markings on individual feathers, whereas the belly and undertail coverts are bright yellow and unmarked. In flight, the wings are blackish brown with a yellow stripe. The tail is dark grey above with incomplete pale yellow bands, which are more prominent on the outer feathers. The eyes are dark. Juveniles are duller green than adults and have bolder black markings.

## Distribution

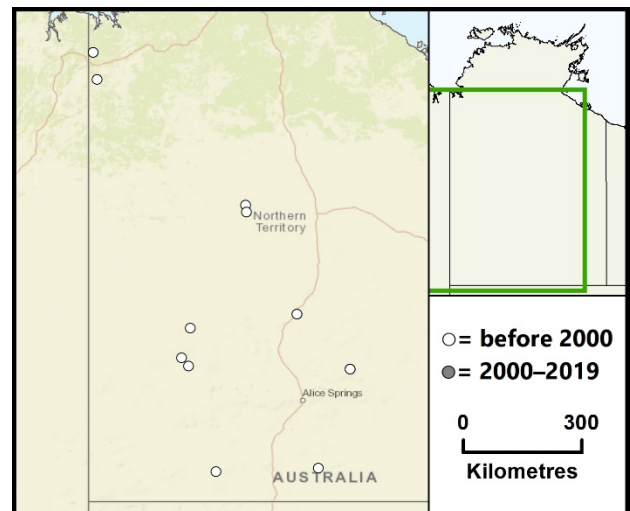
The Night Parrot was evidently distributed widely across arid and semi-arid regions of Australia in the mid-1800s to early 1900s. Its current distribution is poorly known. Confirmed contemporary records of Night Parrots have come from widely separated localities in Western Australia and western Queensland.



Caption: S. Murphy

The Night Parrot was recorded in the Northern Territory (NT) up until 1923, at the Alice Springs Telegraph Station, Horseshoe Bend Station, Idracowra Station, Henbury Station and Hermannsburg<sup>1</sup>. Possible sightings have been reported since this time from Keep River National Park, Newhaven Sanctuary, and Stirling, Muckaty and Kildurk Stations<sup>2</sup>. In January 2017, Night Parrot vocalisations were reportedly collected from an undisclosed locality in the southern NT.

NT conservation reserves where reported: None confirmed.



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

## Ecology and life-history

The Night Parrot occurs in spinifex grasslands in stony or sandy areas, and in ephemeral herblands, samphire and chenopod shrublands on floodplains, salt lakes and clay pans. A landscape-scale mosaic of foraging, roosting and nesting habitats may be an important determinant of the suitability of an area for the species<sup>3</sup>.

The Night Parrot is nocturnal and forages on the ground, resting during the day within mature spinifex. Notoriously elusive, individuals generally become active after sunset and can fly long distances during the night to forage. The diet probably consists of seeds from a variety of grass and forb species and succulent plants. Night Parrots build a rudimentary nest within a spinifex hummock in which they lay up to four white eggs. Breeding may occur at any time of the year, and is evidently stimulated by resource-pulses following heavy rainfall<sup>4</sup>.

Historical observations suggest the species is at least partly nomadic. Night Parrots were sometimes locally common after periods of heavy rain, but during droughts they disappeared from formerly suitable habitat<sup>5</sup>. However, long-term monitoring of a locality in Queensland suggests birds may be sedentary under suitable conditions.

## Threatening processes

Threats to the Night Parrot are poorly understood. Habitat degradation caused by altered fire regimes is likely to be a key threatening process, given the apparent dependence of the species on mature spinifex. Predation by feral Cats *Felis catus*, and perhaps also Red Foxes *Vulpes vulpes*, is probably another key threat. Other potential threats include habitat degradation by livestock and introduced herbivores, and invasive grasses, particularly Buffel Grass *Cenchrus ciliaris*, that facilitate more widespread and/or intense fires. Anthropogenic climate change may have a significant long-term negative impact on the Night Parrot.

## Conservation objectives and management

There is no existing management program for the Night Parrot in the NT. Any credible potential sightings or detections of the species will be investigated.

Conservation and management priorities for the species in Australia include: securing extant populations by mitigating local threats, including controlling feral Cats, minimising the risk of fire and eradicating Buffel Grass; improving knowledge of the biology and ecology of the Night Parrot; identifying the most effective survey method(s); and locating additional populations across its former range<sup>6</sup>.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Whitlock, F.L. 1924. Journey to central Australia in search of the Night Parrot. *Emu* 23, 248–281
- <sup>2</sup> McKean, J.L., 1985. Birds of the Keep River National Park (Northern Territory), including the Night Parrot *Pezoporus occidentalis*. *Aust. Bird. Watch.* 11, 114–130.
- <sup>3</sup> Murphy, S.A., Silcock, J., Murphy, R., Reid, J., Austin, J.J., 2017. Movements and habitat use of the Night Parrot *Pezoporus occidentalis* in south-western Queensland. *Austral Ecol.* 42, 858–868.
- <sup>4</sup> Murphy, S.A., Austin, J.J., Murphy, R.K., Silcock, J., Joseph, L., Garnett, S.T., Leseberg, N.P., Watson, J.E.M., Burbidge, A.H., 2017. Observations on breeding Night Parrots (*Pezoporus occidentalis*) in western Queensland. *Emu* 117, 107–113.
- <sup>5</sup> Andrews, F.W., 1883. Notes on the Night Parrot. *Trans. Proc. Roy. Soc. S. Aust.* 6, 29–30.
- <sup>6</sup> Threatened Species Scientific Committee, 2016. Conservation Advice *Pezoporus occidentalis* Night Parrot. Department of the Environment, Canberra.