



BIRD

Falcunculus frontatus frontatus

Crested Shrike-tit

| AUS | SA | AMLR | Endemism | Residency |
|-----|----|------|----------|-----------|
| - | R | V | - | Resident |



Photo: © Joan Paton

Conservation Significance

The AMLR distribution is part of a limited extant distribution in adjacent regions within SA. The species has been described as 'probably declining' within the AMLR.² Within the AMLR the species' relative area of occupancy is classified as 'Very Restricted'.⁴

Three subspecies have been recognised which differ in their conservation status (Garnett and Crowley 2000).² However some authors have elevated them to species level but the status remains unclear. In a recent taxonomic review, Christidis and Boles (2008) tentatively accepts only the one species.³

Geographically isolated in the region.¹ Has declined extensively in SA as woodlands are cleared and/or degraded (G. Carpenter *pers. comm.*).

Description

Small to medium-sized bird, stocky in appearance. Male has a black and white striped head and a black erectile crest. Throat black, forming a bib over the pale yellow breast, upper-body olive/brown. Female very similar to the male except she has a black chin grading into a dark olive-green/grey throat. Juveniles have a similar head pattern to the adult birds, but differ markedly in having a pale

cream throat, pale yellow under parts and a pale brown/olive back. Main calls are a chuckling call described in words as 'Knock-at-the-door' and a mournful whistle (descending note) (Rix 1976, Boles 1988). Frequently located by the loud bark tearing sounds they make when foraging.²

Distribution and Population

Endemic to Australia. It occurs across southern Australia, in northern WA and in the Northern Territory.

Ubiquitous in the MLR, but average recording rate across the region has declined from 42% to 5% of surveys for the pre-1980 to post-1995 periods (Regional scale changes in MLR Report).²

Most important sub-regions are the spine of the AMLR and the southern agricultural area. Has always been less frequently recorded on the eastern flanks of the MLR. The northern agricultural area and to a lesser extent the southern agricultural area, have declined in relative importance for this species.²

Post-1983 AMLR filtered records widespread across the region with records concentrated along the northern spine of the MLR.⁴

Most pre-1983 AMLR filtered records in Adelaide and central MLR areas as well as isolated records from Sandy Creek CP and Mount Compass.⁴

Habitat

Occurs predominantly in Eucalypt woodlands and forests. This species has a predilection for Eucalypts with decorticating bark, their preferred foraging substrate, however they will occupy a wide range of woodland/forest communities, including those dominated by stringybarks (Noske 2003a).²

Within the AMLR the preferred broad vegetation groups are Grassy Woodland, Heathy Woodland and Riparian.⁴

Biology and Ecology

No detailed studies of this species have been conducted. Typically seen singly or in pairs but after breeding, pairs may have attendant young. Appear to be sedentary and possibly territorial (Noske 2003a). In some locations they have been described as nomadic (Baldwin 1975). This is supported by observations of breeding pairs in Sandy Creek CP increasing from two to five to seven over two years with the additional pairs only present between August and December of each

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year (Rix 1976). SA Atlas surveys also found that although the number of grid cells this species was recorded in between the two survey periods (1974-75 and 1984-85) was very similar, there was an almost 50% change in the actual grid cells occupied (Paton et al. 1994). This species is generally found at low densities of between 0.05 and 0.6 birds/ha (Ford et al. 1985, Recher and Holmes 1985, Noske 2003a).²

In South Australia, they breed in spring (Rix 1976), with nests containing eggs in October and November (Attiwill 1972). This is similar to studies in other parts of its range (Marchant 1981, Noske 2003b). Nest is generally built in a vertical fork in the foliage of Eucalypts, 10-30 m high and constructed of shredded bark, bound together with spider's web, often difficult to see from the ground (Beruldsen 2003). Breeding is generally in pairs, but records of three adults feeding fledglings have been documented in NSW, suggesting that cooperative breeding may occasionally occur (Howe and Noske 1980).²

Eastern Crested Shrike-tits usually lay clutches of three eggs, but sometimes only two (Beruldsen 2003). Incubation period is approximately 19 days, and nestlings fledge around 17 days after hatching (Noske 2003b). The species shows extended parental care of juveniles for up to three to six months post-fledging, which explains observations of up to five birds occupying a single home range (Noske 2003b). Therefore, this species may have a social structure which would be disrupted by habitat fragmentation. There are no documented data on breeding success, productivity or survival of this species.²

Aboriginal Significance

Post-1983 records indicate the AMLR distribution occurs in Ngarrindjeri, Kurna, Ngadjuri and Peramangk Nations.⁴

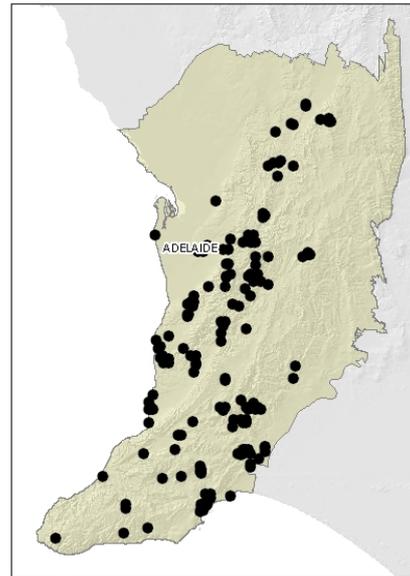
Threats

Threats to its persistence are not well understood but the following may have contributed to the species decline and/or represent existing threats to its persistence: vegetation clearance, habitat fragmentation, loss of specific resources (e.g. mature trees) and fire.² Prescribed burning, however, is unlikely to impact on the species provided regenerating woodland Eucalypts are available (G. Carpenter *pers. comm.*). Given the very low population densities of this species, any continuing loss and degradation of large habitat areas is of serious concern (P. Paton *pers. comm.*)

Additional current direct threats have been identified and rated for this species. Refer to the main plan

accompanying these profiles.

Regional Distribution



Map based on filtered post-1983 records.⁴ Note, this map does not necessarily represent the actual species' distribution within the AMLR.

References

Note: In some cases original reference sources are not included in this list, however they can be obtained from the reference from which the information has been sourced (the reference cited in superscript).

- 1 Armstrong, D. M., Croft, S. N. and Foulkes, J. N. (2003). *A Biological Survey of the Southern Mount Lofty Ranges, South Australia, 2000-2001*. Department for Environment and Heritage, South Australia.
- 2 Cale, B. (2005). *Towards a Recovery Plan for the Declining Birds of the Mount Lofty Ranges*. Scientific Resource Document for Birds for Biodiversity. Unpublished Report.
- 3 Christidis, L. and Boles, W. E. (2008). *Systematics and Taxonomy of Australian Birds*. CSIRO Publishing.
- 4 Department for Environment and Heritage (2007). *Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges Regional Recovery Pilot Project Database*. Unpublished data extracted and edited from BDBSA, SA Herbarium (July 2007) and other sources.

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