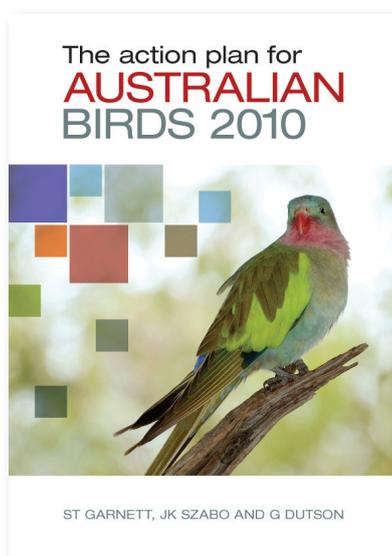


Book Review



The Action Plan for Australian Birds 2010

Stephen Garnett, Judit Szabo and Guy Dutson. 2011. CSIRO Publishing. Paperback, 456 pp. ISBN 9780643103689. RRP \$49.95.

Nineteen years since publication of the first version, *The Action Plan for Australian Birds 2010* provides a timely snapshot of the status of the continent's avian diversity. Stephen Garnett and colleagues, with the assistance of many knowledgeable ornithologists, ecologists and bird enthusiasts, have produced a detailed, concise, accessible and comprehensive summary of 238 threatened or near threatened Australian taxa (species and subspecies). Each species' (or subspecies') profile includes an assessment of its conservation status (*Critically Endangered*, *Endangered*, *Vulnerable* or *Near Threatened*) based on IUCN Red List criteria, reasons for listing, equivalent assessments from 1990 and 2000 for comparison, descriptions of range, abundance, ecology and threats, and brief outlines of research and management requirements. Accompanying each profile is an informative distribution map as well as a table summarising standard data on population size, trends and geographic range.

This book represents the most up-to-date single reference on the conservation of Australian bird species, and will be a valuable guide for natural resource management agencies, community groups and governments. Specific information on species' range, threats and conservation priorities will be useful for informing planning and biodiversity management activity, however, the Action Plan's scope is limited and thus it should not be solely relied on when developing recovery programs. The quality and specificity of information on management requirements varies between species, but is generally quite broad. For example; "*Determine and implement ways to manage forests for the conservation of the subspecies*" (Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo).

Collecting accurate and reliable demographic data for threatened or rare species is generally challenging, therefore, it is somewhat surprising that this book manages to report a single,

definitive value (albeit with *low*, *medium* or *high* reliability) for each of seven parameters (extent of occurrence, area of occupancy, number of mature individuals, number of subpopulations, number of locations, generation time, and global population share) for every listed taxa. Here the IUCN Red List categorisation of *Data Deficient* was "...eschewed...though good information is lacking for many taxa [because it had been found that] action was much less likely for taxa in [this] category..." It is clear that the authors have made every effort to verify their information, via both the scientific literature (a bibliography is included with each profile) and consultation with relevant experts (also listed). However, with this kind of data it is inevitable that accuracy – to some extent at least – will be sacrificed for comprehensiveness. This is acceptable as long as the limitations of the data are acknowledged and the data are not over-represented.

This is an important publication due to the fact that it will be used as a reference by many organisations, including government, when making decisions with respect to threatened species management, conservation priorities and related regulatory issues. Therefore, the authors have a responsibility to be precautionary – a sentiment expressed in the introduction, "...*The IUCN Red List is not a statutory list. As such we often are able to be more precautionary than is possible in legislative schedules...*" However, this statement is somewhat inconsistent with the IUCN Red List assessments presented within, considering that many are less severe than the equivalent species' current federal listing (EPBC 1999). For example, three species for which there was disagreement among the expert panel (indicating a lack of reliable quantitative data): Southern Cassowary *Casuarius johnsonii* (assessed as Vulnerable, EPBC listed as Endangered); Superb Parrot *Polytelis swainsonii* (assessed as Least Concern, EPBC listed as Vulnerable); and Gouldian Finch *Erythrura gouldiae* (assessed as Near Threatened, EPBC listed as Endangered). For this reason, readers should be cautious when making inferences about species' relative security and/or the relative benefit of intervention, based on the information presented in this book.

Finally, there are some useful and interesting appendices worth noting: A map showing an overlay of threatened species distributions across the continent provides a neat illustration of the areas/habitats where threatening processes are most severe (e.g. NSW grassy woodlands and the Southern Ocean). Also, a table itemising species that have been excluded from this edition, including a justification, will be helpful for those wondering what happened to their favourite species in the last 10 years.

Garnett, Szabo and Dutson have done a good job of bringing together a large body of expertise, from diverse sources, which is interpretable by all. For those who are interested in Australia's unique avian fauna and care about their plight, it's well worth the read.

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