

THESE LEGS WERE MADE FOR WALKING – TEMPORAL AND SPATIAL VARIATION IN THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE COMB-CRESTED JACANA *Irediparra gallinacea* IN NEW SOUTH WALES

ERROL R. NYE^{1,2,3} and CHRIS R. DICKMAN¹

¹Institute of Wildlife Research, School of Biological Sciences, Heydon-Laurence Building, University of Sydney, NSW 2006, Australia.

²Present address: 40 Harrington Street, Port Chalmers, 9005, New Zealand.

³Corresponding author. E-mail: errol_nye@yahoo.com.au.

Received: 9 July 2008

The range of the Comb-crested Jacana *Irediparra gallinacea* in New South Wales is thought to have extended southward from the north-eastern coast to near Sydney in the 1930s, and to be receding again now. We review all available atlas records, literature sources, sightings and other records to clarify the species' distribution and status in New South Wales. Records from Windsor in the early 1840s and from near Mudgee in 1889 suggest that Comb-crested Jacanas resided as far south as Sydney at the time of European settlement, and more recent records confirm that this southern distributional boundary has not changed. However, historical records do indicate that the southern edge of the distribution is unstable. Fluctuations in the presence and abundance of Comb-crested Jacanas along this edge appear to be the result of limited tolerance to extreme climatic events, such as drought, and reduced fecundity in southern latitudes. The draining and degradation of larger wetlands on the New South Wales coast will reduce the viability of vital drought refuges, and may increase the pressure on already unstable local populations along the species' southern distributional boundary. Wetland conservation will be essential to stop further population losses.