

Book Review



The Action Plan for Australian Birds 2020. Garnett, S.T. and Baker, G.B. (Eds.) 2021. CSIRO Publishing, Melbourne. Hardback. 816 pp., black and white illustrations. ISBN: 9781486311903. RRP \$A 150.00.

The 2020 Action Plan for Australian Birds is the fourth in a series of such plans produced since 1990. This plan defines the reasons for the extinction or presumed demise of several species and subspecies, but its primary aim is to compile and outline, in a single document, the range of threats facing the many declining, extant species, with particular emphasis on the recognition of threats affecting subspecies and populations. The plan discusses actions already taken to address declines and suggests actions which should be taken to arrest them.

This publication contains the most comprehensive overview ever compiled on the conservation status of threatened bird species in Australia and its territories. It does not provide data on abundant species, but 316 taxa are considered in detail. Ninety-nine bird species have regrettably been upgraded to a more threatened status from that assigned in previous plans, but pleasingly, because of actions taken during the past decade, 23

species have been downgraded. The book discusses such issues as the impacts of climate change and the associated increased impact of wildfire and temperature rises that appear to be causing lowland species in some areas to seek relief at higher, cooler altitudes. This in turn affects the viability of upland species, which for various reasons cannot compete with the new arrivals. The plan also highlights the impacts on migratory species of land use changes and hunting and fishing etc. in regions outside of Australia's control.

The editors have followed the IUCN Red List guidelines in providing details of each of the numerous aspects of a taxon's biology and the threats facing it. A table included in the introduction provides a summary of the five IUCN Red List Criteria used to evaluate whether a taxon belongs in a particular threatened category (Critically Endangered, Endangered or Vulnerable). The current eligibility against IUCN Red List Criteria and assessment data is tabulated for each species or subspecies identified as threatened in the plan. The authors were also guided by Australian Commonwealth, state and territory conservation agencies in providing information on the parameters influencing extinction risk for each species or subspecies. The action plan suggests courses of action which could and should be addressed to ameliorate population declines in each species that has been evaluated as being under threat.

For each of the taxa detailed in the plan there is a black and white illustration and details are provided of range (with an Australian distribution map), reference to indigenous lands, and a discussion of abundance, ecology, monitoring, threats, conservation objectives and actions underway and research and management actions required. For each taxon a bibliography and citations are provided.

Over 300 persons with specialist knowledge of particular species, or populations thereof, contributed their expertise to the compilation of this valuable volume. The 2020 Action Plan is a thought-provoking document that is well worth reading by everyone with a serious interest in bird conservation. It will undoubtedly be a very important reference for conservation agencies in directing land management initiatives and should inspire specific research directions for those agencies, other institutions and private individuals for at least the next decade

Jeff Hardy

