

TAXON SUMMARY

Lewin's Rail (eastern)

1	Family	Rallidae
2	Scientific name	<i>Rallus pectoralis pectoralis</i> Temminck 1831
3	Common name	Lewin's Rail (eastern)
4	Conservation status	Near Threatened: c

5 Reasons for listing

A decline in density over at least half the subspecies' range (Near Threatened: c) is suggested by the subspecies' scarcity in comparison to the Tasmanian subspecies, and the contraction of mainland wetlands.

	Estimate	Reliability
Extent of occurrence	400,000 km ²	high
trend	stable	high
Area of occupancy	1,000 km ²	low
trend	declining	low
No. of breeding birds	20,000	low
trend	decreasing	low
No. of sub-populations	1	high
Generation time	3 years	low

6 Intraspecific taxa

R. p. clelandi (western Australia) is Extinct and *R. p. brachipus* (Tasmania) is Least Concern. There are seven other subspecies in South-east Asia and the Pacific. Globally the species is Least Concern.

7 Past range and abundance

Disjunct distribution through near-coastal environments between Kangaroo I., S. A., and Townsville, Qld, as well as throughout Gippsland, Vic., and high country between Melbourne and Canberra (Marchant and Higgins, 1993). Breeding probably throughout most of range, but uncertain as nests are cryptic.

8 Present range and abundance

As above.

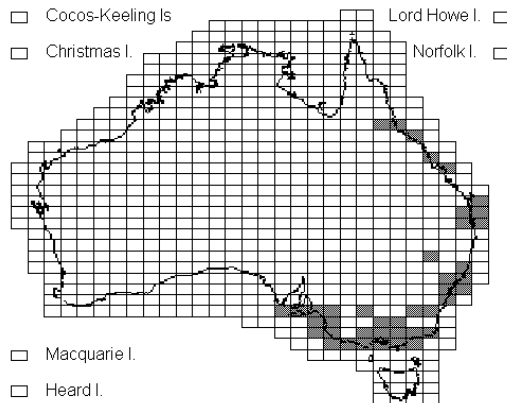
9 Ecology

Lewin's Rails inhabit permanent to ephemeral, fresh to saline wetlands that have dense emergent or fringing vegetation. They also use artificial habitats with similar structural features. Avoiding exposure, they generally skulk in the vegetation, taking a range of invertebrates, and, occasionally, birds eggs and frogs. Their cup nests are usually well-hidden within low vegetation, above water, or on or near the ground; 3-5 eggs are laid in spring or summer (Marchant and Higgins, 1993).

10 Threats

Loss of habitat through drainage and river diversion is the primary threat to the eastern subspecies of Lewin's Rail. Lewin's Rails are also likely to abandon wetlands

where the fringing vegetation has been degraded by grazing, inappropriate burning, or trampling and rooting by stock and feral pigs. Some birds are killed by foxes, pigs and cats, as well as traffic, mowers, fences, windows, rabbit traps and powerlines (Marchant and Higgins, 1993). Fox predation may partly explain the difference in abundance between the eastern subspecies and Tasmanian subspecies. Apparent rarity is not entirely the result of the species' secretive behaviour, since it is often heard in Tasmania. Extinction of the south-western subspecies suggests that the species is more vulnerable to habitat change than many other wetland birds.



11 Recommended actions

- 11.1 Develop monitoring techniques and implement monitoring at permanent swamps where subspecies occurs regularly. The probability of detecting occurrence could be tested using the more abundant Tasmanian subspecies.
- 11.2 Test for links between fox-baiting programs and abundance of Lewin's Rail.
- 11.3 Drainage of swamps where subspecies occurs should be strongly discouraged.

12 Bibliography

Marchant, S. and Higgins, P. J. (eds), 1993. Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds. Vol. 2. Raptors to Lapwings. Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

Comments received from

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