

TAXON SUMMARY

# Squatter Pigeon (southern)

1	Family	Columbidae
2	Scientific name	<i>Geophaps scripta scripta</i> (Temminck, 1821)
3	Common name	Squatter Pigeon (southern)
4	Conservation status	Near Threatened: a

5 Reasons for listing

This subspecies has disappeared from the southern half of its historical range (Near Threatened: a), a trend that does not appear to be continuing.

	Estimate	Reliability
Extent of occurrence	440,000 km <sup>2</sup>	medium
trend	stable	high
Area of occupancy	10,000 km <sup>2</sup>	low
trend	stable	medium
No. of breeding birds	40,000	low
trend	stable	medium
No. of sub-populations	1	low
Generation time	5 years	low

6 Intraspecific taxa

*G. s. peninsulæ* (north-east Queensland, southern Cape York Peninsula) is Least Concern, as is species.

7 Past range and abundance

Inland slopes of the Great Dividing Range, between West Wyalong, N. S. W., and Burdekin-Lynd Divide, Qld, extending to the coast between Port Curtis and Proserpine, Qld, and inland as far as Longreach and Charleville (Morris *et al.*, 1981, Frith, 1982, Blakers *et al.*, 1984, Higgins and Davies, 1996, Schodde and Mason, 1997). Broad zone of hybridisation with the northern subspecies along the Burdekin-Lynd Divide (Ford, 1986, Schodde and Mason, 1997). Presumed to breed throughout range. The subspecies was apparently always uncommon in the south of its range. Elsewhere, seen in pairs or flocks of up to 30 birds (Blakers *et al.*, 1984).

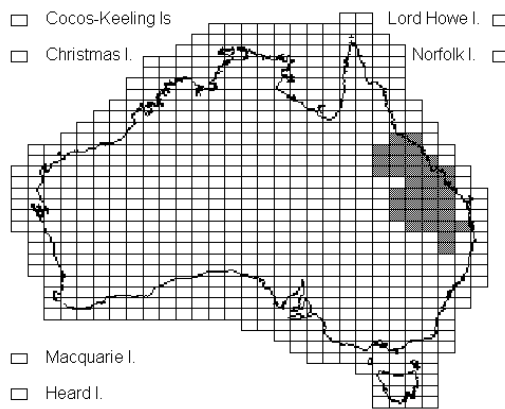
8 Present range and abundance

No unequivocal sightings in New South Wales since 1970s (Ayers, 1996, Higgins and Davies, 1996) but still occurs patchily throughout former range in eastern Queensland. Rapid decline last century now slowed and still locally abundant (R. Johnson, J. Woinarski). Southern habitat may be fragmented, but capacity of subspecies to move across unsuitable habitat is unknown.

9 Ecology

The grassy understorey of eucalypt woodland, usually with ready access to water, is the principal habitat of the southern subspecies of Squatter Pigeon. Sandy areas dissected by gravel ridges are preferred, and

burnt areas are frequented (Frith, 1982). Squatter Pigeons nest on the ground, usually laying two eggs in sheltered positions, and forage for seeds (including those of improved pasture species) on bare ground between sparse grasses (Crome, 1976, Frith, 1982).



10 Threats

In New South Wales, the disappearance of the Squatter Pigeon has been attributed to overgrazing at times of drought, followed by clearing. Further north grazing has been principally by cattle, which may have been less damaging (Frith, 1982), but ongoing clearance may be fragmenting the population. Cattle grazing followed by drought in 1902 apparently caused a decline in numbers in the Suttor and Dawson River valleys (Campbell and Barnard, 1917, Barnard and Barnard, 1925), but the species is again common there (J. Woinarski). Perversely, the northern subspecies declined in apparent response to disappearance of an exotic legume (Garnett *et al.*, 1998). Fox predation may also be a threat (Ayers, 1996), with most decline having occurred in areas of high fox abundance (R. Johnson). Overall, although there is little new information, extent of current range, density where present, abundance of northern subspecies in grazed pastures with introduced legumes, and recovery in Dawson R. valley mean the subspecies no longer meets the IUCN criteria for Vulnerable recommended by Garnett (1992).

11 Recommended actions

- 11.1 Define population size and distribution in N. S. W. and southern Qld and assess conservation status and requirements.

- 11.2 Study ecology of the subspecies in central or northern Queensland to determine the relationship between pigeon abundance, tree density and stocking rate.
- 11.3 Establish monitoring sites, preferably with the co-operation of local land-holders or conservation organisations.
- 11.4 Develop a public education program and community-based tree planting scheme for the most favoured habitat types.

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### Comments received from

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