

RECOVERY OUTLINE

Star Finch (Cape York Peninsula)

1	Family	Ploceidae
2	Scientific name	<i>Neochmia ruficauda clarescens</i> (Hartert, 1899)
3	Common name	Star Finch (Cape York Peninsula)
4	Conservation status	Endangered: B1+2c

5 Reasons for listing

This subspecies occupies two locations with a combined area of about 400 km² (Endangered: B1), in which the quality of habitat is declining (2c)

	Estimate	Reliability
Extent of occurrence	55,000 km ²	medium
trend	stable	medium
Area of occupancy	400 km ²	low
trend	decreasing	medium
No. of breeding birds	5,000	low
trend	stable	medium
No. of sub-populations	2	medium
Largest sub-population	3,000	low
Generation time	2 years	low

6 Intraspecific taxa

N. r. subclarescens (north Western Australia and Northern Territory) is Near Threatened. *N. r. ruficauda* (central eastern Queensland) is Critically Endangered. The recent separation of *N. r. subclarescens* from *N. r. clarescens* (Schodde and Mason, 1999) has yet to be confirmed by genetic studies.

7 Past range and abundance

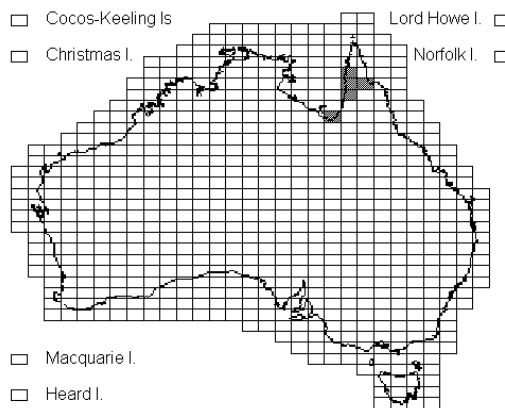
Cape York Peninsula, intergrading with *N. r. ruficauda* across the Burdekin-Lynd Divide and with *N. r. subclarescens* across the Gulf of Carpentaria (Schodde and Mason, 1999).

8 Present range and abundance

No historical decline in range, with recent records from northern Lakefield National Park in the east and sites near Aurukun, Pormpuraaw, Kowanyama and Karumba in the west (Garnett and Bredl, 1985, Holmes, 1998, M. Todd). Banding studies suggests about 400 individuals at Pormpuraaw, and several thousand on Lakefield (M. Todd).

9 Ecology

The Star Finch is considered to be a largely sedentary occupant of grasslands or grassy woodland near water (Garnett and Bredl, 1985, Holmes, 1998). It builds domed nests in patches of rank grass, reeds or low in trees, usually near water (Holmes, 1998). At Lakefield and Pormpuraaw, dry season flocks disperse in the wet season to nearby saltmarsh, returning to grassland to breed as the wet season ends (M. Todd, Birds Australia North Queensland).



10 Threats

Grasslands on Cape York Peninsula, particularly those occupied by Star Finches, are being invaded by woody weeds, particularly Broad-leaved Ti-tree *Melaleuca viridiflora*, at a rate of about 1% per year. It is thought that the invasion is a result of altered fire regimes and grazing by cattle (Neldner *et al.*, 1997, Crowley and Garnett, 1998). The recognition of birds on Cape York Peninsula as a distinct subspecies (Schodde and Mason, 1999) may lead to pressure for illegal collecting but, given the annual turnover, this is unlikely to make much impact.

11 Information required

- 11.1 Determine foods eaten and habitat used during the early wet season.
- 11.2 Understand the fire regimes most likely to allow the persistence of grasslands.
- 11.3 Test recent taxonomy with genetic analysis.

12 Recovery objectives

- 12.1 Maintain all sub-populations.
- 12.2 Reverse the trend in habitat condition.

13 Actions completed or under way

- 13.1 A two-year study of Star Finch ecology is under-way.
- 13.2 Targeted surveys for Star Finches are being undertaken in the early wet season.
- 13.3 A fire history of Lakefield is being developed.

14 Management actions required

14.1 In consultation with local land managers, develop and implement fire management based on fire history analysis that will maintain grasslands or reverse their loss.

15 Organisations responsible for conservation

Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service.

16 Other organisations involved

Aurukun Shire Council, Lockhart River Council, Pormpuraaw Council and Kowanyama Community Council, Rirmerr Aboriginal Corporation, landholders, Birds Australia, Northern Territory University, Cooperative Research Centre for Sustainable Development of Tropical Savannas.

17 Staff and financial resources required for recovery to be carried out

Staff resources required 2001-2005

0.2

*Project Officer*¹

Financial resources required 2001-2005

<i>Action</i>	<i>Conservation agencies</i>	<i>Other funding sources</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Continue study of ecology</i> ¹	\$19,000	\$24,500	\$43,500
<i>Search during wet season</i>	\$75,000	\$140,000	\$215,000
<i>Genetic comparisons</i> ¹	\$0	\$5,000	\$5,000
<i>Analyse fire histories</i> ²	\$5,000	\$3,000	\$8,000
<i>Plan and implement appropriate fire management</i> ²	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$10,000
<i>Total</i>	\$104,000	\$177,500	\$281,500

¹ Costs shared with Star Finch. (Cape York Peninsula)

² Fire history and management protocols are being developed for a variety of purposes, costs shared with Star Finch (Cape York Peninsula) and Golden-shouldered Parrot and relate only to specific costs for finch habitat

18 Bibliography

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Garnett, S. T. and Bredl, R. 1985 An annotated list of the birds in the Vicinity of Edward River Settlement. *Sunbird* 15:6-23, 25-40.

Holmes, G. 1998. A review of the distribution, status and ecology of the Star Finch *Nechmia ruficauda* in Queensland. *Aust. Bird Watcher* 17:278-289.

Neldner, V. J., Fensham, R. J., Clarkson, J. R. and Stanton, J. P. 1997. The natural grasslands of Cape York Peninsula, Australia: Description, distribution and conservation status. *Biol. Conserv.* 81:121-136.

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Comments received from Mick Todd.