

TAXON SUMMARY

Star Finch (western)

1	Family	Estrildidae
2	Scientific name	<i>Neochmia ruficauda subclarescens</i> (Mathews, 1912)
3	Common name	Star Finch (western)
4	Conservation status	Near Threatened: c

5 Reasons for listing

A decrease in density across the historical range is indicated by frequency of recording (Near Threatened: c).

	Estimate	Reliability
Extent of occurrence	750,000 km ²	medium
trend	stable	medium
Area of occupancy	50,000 km ²	low
trend	decreasing	high
No. of breeding birds	200,000	low
trend	decreasing	high
No. of sub-populations	3	medium
Largest sub-population	100,000	low
Generation time	2 years	low

6 Intraspecific taxa

N. r. clarescens (Cape York Peninsula) is Endangered.

N. r. ruficauda (eastern Queensland, north-east New South Wales) is Critically Endangered, possibly Extinct.

7 Past range and abundance

Three sub-populations across northern Australia: Shark Bay to Cape Keraudren, Pilbara, W. A., Fitzroy R. valley, west Kimberley and Gibb R., W. A. to Queensland/ Northern Territory border (Schodde and Mason, 1999). Believed to hybridise with *N. r. clarescens* across Gulf of Carpentaria (Schodde and Mason, 1999).

8 Present range and abundance

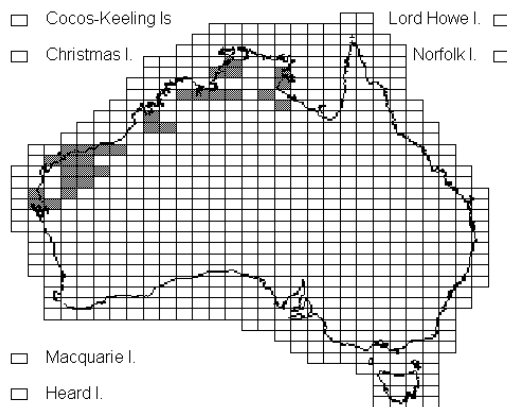
As above, but apparently at much reduced density (Franklin, 1999). In the Pilbara, density is low and distribution patchy, with occasional concentrations at Exmouth and Millstream. Present all year in large numbers at Kununurra (A. Start).

9 Ecology

Star Finches live in grasslands and eucalypt woodland close to water, where they feed on seeds (Hall, 1974, Immelmann, 1982, M. Todd). Birds tend to be resident in large flocks during the dry season, and disperse to breed during the wet season. They are particularly abundant in the irrigated grasslands of Kununurra, where they feed on the seeds of a number of weedy grasses, and among the watered suburban gardens of Pilbara towns (A. Start).

10 Threats

Over-grazing of grasslands near water is probably the principal threat, as it removes cover and food. There may also be selective dry season grazing of perennials grasses that are needed for survival during the wet season. Star Finches probably survive in towns and irrigation areas because seeding, weedy grasses are not grazed. Patterns of burning during the year may become important during the wet season when fallen seed is in short supply, and survival may be lower where burning mosaics have been altered.



11 Recommended actions

- 11.1 Monitor any site known to be occupied by Star Finches for impacts of grazing.
- 11.2 Use fencing and artificial watering exclude stock from sensitive habitat, particularly near water.
- 11.3 Determine the role of fire in maintaining habitat outside irrigation areas.

12 Bibliography

- Hall, H. F. (ed.) 1974. Birds of the Harold Hall Australian Expeditions. British Museum of Natural History, London.
- Franklin, D. C. 1999. Evidence of disarray amongst granivorous bird assemblages in the savannas of northern Australia, a region of sparse human settlement. *Biol. Conserv.* 90:53-68
- Immelmann, K. 1982. *Australian Finches*. Angus and Robertson, Sydney.

Schodde, R. and Mason, I. J. 1999. *The Directory of Australian Birds: Passerines*. CSIRO, Collingwood, Victoria.

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