

THE NIGHT PARROT

The Night Parrot, *Pezoporus occidentalis*, is a small broad-tailed parrot endemic to the continent of Australia. The species was originally placed within its own genus *Geopsittacus*, but most authors now prefer to place it within the genus *Pezoporus* together with the Ground Parrot. The well-known Budgerigar, *Melopsittacus undulates*, is a not-too-distant relative of these birds.

There were no reported sightings of the bird between 1912 and 1979, leading to speculation that it was extinct. However, since 1979 there have been a few rare sightings. The species' remote habitat and secretive nature makes its population size extremely hard to establish, estimates range from almost extinct to not threatened at all. It is currently listed on the IUCN Red List as Critically Endangered.

The Night Parrot is a relatively small bird. Their colouration is predominantly yellowish-green, mottled with dark brown, blacks and yellows. It can be distinguished from the superficially similar Ground Parrot by its shorter tail and different range and habitat. The species is predominantly terrestrial, taking to the air only when panicked or in search of water. The Night Parrot has furtive, nocturnal habits and even when it was abundant was apparently a difficult bird to observe. The natural habitat is the spinifex grass country that still dominates much of the dry, dusty interior of Australia. Early reports indicate that it never strayed far from water.

There have been only a few reliable records of the bird since the 1880s, with the last authenticated report dating from 2006, when rangers found a dead specimen which had flown into a barbed wire fence in the Diamantina National Park in south-western Queensland. Previous to this, the last reliable sighting was in 2005 near Minga Well, in the Pilbara region of Western Australia when three individuals were observed. Reliable sightings were made in 1990 when a road kill specimen was discovered by scientists returning from an expedition in a remote part of Queensland and 1979 when Ornithologist Shane A. Parker from the South Australian Museum reported seeing a flock of the birds in the far north of South Australia.

R.V.C. with help from Wikipedia