

Australian Threatened Species

Bush stone-curlew *Burhinus grallarius*

CONSERVATION STATUS

VICTORIA: Endangered (and listed under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*)

NEW SOUTH WALES: Endangered (*Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995*)

SOUTH AUSTRALIA: Vulnerable (*National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972*)

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

Bush Stone-curlews are birds standing 50 – 60 centimetres high, with long gangly legs, large yellow eyes, and grey-streaked upper parts. Their colouring makes them hard to see in bushland, especially in the dusky shadows and evenings, when they are most active.

WHERE DOES IT LIVE?

The curlew's range in south-eastern Australia is now largely confined to grassy woodlands and farmland. While the bird is found in all mainland states, its range has declined drastically in southeastern Australia. It is now extinct in many former spots south of the Great Dividing Range. While its Victorian and New South Wales stronghold is along the border region, it is sparsely distributed and continues to decline.

The curlew likes to roost and nest in grassy woodlands of buloke, gum or box with low, sparse grassy or herb understorey. Nests are usually beside a fallen log, which probably makes it harder for foxes to find. Curlews prefer a sparse understorey so they can see predators while foraging for insects.

Branches on the ground are essential for the bird's camouflage, and it is unlikely to attempt nesting without it. Research and experience shows how important 'untidy' landscapes covered with fallen timber are for birds, small mammals, reptiles and insects.

DID YOU KNOW...

- If disturbed Bush Stone-curlews crouch down or freeze, rather than fly away
- The bird has a distinctively eerie call, "wer-loo wer-loo", which is often the only way to know this secretive nocturnal bird is out and about
- Historically the species has been recorded in groups of 50 to 100 birds. However these large flocks no longer occur in Victoria, and many sightings on private land have declined from 4 to 1 pair per property in the last 30 years.



Photo: Dan Harley

FOXES: A MAJOR THREAT!



WHY ARE FOXES A PROBLEM IN AUSTRALIA?

Hunting by the European red fox is a major threat to the survival of many species of native Australian fauna. Smaller mammals and ground-nesting birds such as the Bush Stone-curlew are at greatest risk, but the fox also preys upon reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates.

Even at low densities foxes can eliminate remaining native populations and jeopardise species recovery programs.

HOW DO THEY THREATEN THE BUSH STONE-CURLEW?

The main cause of decline of the bird in south-eastern Australia has been clearing and continued fragmentation at least 85 per cent of habitat in Victoria. Stock can also trample curlew eggs. However, predation by foxes, particularly in areas where fallen timber has been removed, has become a major concern. Foxes often prevent the birds from nesting successfully.

Removing fallen timber from around trees takes away cover and camouflage for nesting curlews. Their reliance on fallen timber makes them particularly vulnerable to foxes as well as cats.

WHAT'S BEING DONE?

Landholders and community groups are working together to control foxes, protect curlews from predation, conserve woodland habitat and retain fallen timber so the birds can breed successfully. Some landholders have built predator-proof fencing to protect curlews that have failed to nest for long periods of time.

State Governments are working with landholders to encourage and assist with habitat conservation and fox control, particularly through Landcare-related programs and strategic planning.

Through the Natural Heritage Trust the Australian Government has funded a range of regional activities to control foxes, and key priorities from the National Threat Abatement Plan to gain better means of fox control.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Most Bush Stone-curlews in south-eastern Australia occur on private land. Landholders can undertake fox control efforts, keep stock away from nesting sites and allow fallen branches and bark to collect on the property
- Think about our native species before you collect firewood. Firewood collection can remove essential habitat for the Bush Stone-curlew and many other animals
- Protect woodland habitat and allow fallen branches and bark to collect
- Keep an eye and ear out for the Bush Stone-curlew and report any sightings to your state environment department. You could get involved with a local bird group or Friends group to support and encourage conservation efforts.

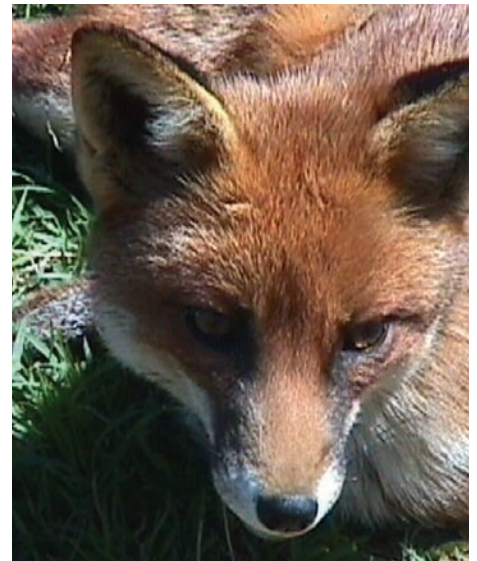


Photo: Frank Busana

CONTACT AND REFERENCES

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Weeds Australia
Visit: www.weeds.org.au/noxious.htm

You can also find out more information about Australia's threatened species by visiting www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened or contacting the Department of the Environment and Heritage Community Information Unit on free-call 1800 803 772.

- Department of Sustainability and Environment: 136 186 or www.dse.vic.gov.au
- Department of Sustainability and Environment (1997): Flora and Fauna Guarantee Action Statement No 78 Bush Stone-Curlew *Burhinus grallarius*

