Australian Threatened Species

Superb Parrot *Polytelis swainsonii*

CONSERVATION STATUS

COMMONWEALTH: **Vulnerable**
(Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999)
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY: **Vulnerable** *(Nature Conservation Act 1980)*
NEW SOUTH WALES: **Vulnerable** *(Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995)*
VICTORIA: **Threatened** (and listed under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988)*

Photo: Katherine Miller

The Superb Parrot is a striking bird found in central woodland areas of southern New South Wales (NSW), the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and Victoria. Already under threat from land clearing, loss of hollows, and lack of regeneration of woodland habitat, this species may soon be faced with another challenge – the common myna bird.

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

The Superb Parrot is a medium-sized bird with a long slender tail. Both males and females have a green body, although the plumage on males tends to be more brilliant. Males also have a yellow forehead and cheeks with a throat trimmed with scarlet, while females display a more plain bluish colouring on the face.

WHERE DOES IT LIVE?

The parrots are found in the NSW southwest slopes as well as northern parts of the ACT and north central Victoria. Each spring they retreat towards the southwest to breed, mainly in River and Blakely's red gums. They then move further north and east, relying on woodland habitat for flowers, fruits and seed, particularly in box and Blakely's red gum. As one of the many Australian bird species that uses tree hollows for breeding, clearing of woodland areas has had a large impact on the parrot and, with minimal replacement of old trees, its numbers may continue to decline in the future.

DID YOU KNOW...

- The total population of the Superb Parrot is estimated to be only a few thousand birds
- It is the official emblem of NSW's Boorowa Shire
- The species is also known as the Barraband Parrot, Parraband Parakeet, Scarlet-breasted Parrot or Green Leek.

THE COMMON MYNA BIRD: A MAJOR THREAT!

FIGHT BACK AGAINST FERALS

WHY ARE COMMON MYNA BIRDS A PROBLEM IN AUSTRALIA?

Common mynas *(Acridotheres tristis),* also known as Indian mynas, were introduced to Australia in 1862. Brought in to control insects in Melbourne's market gardens, they were also released in other parts of the country for pest control. The birds proved to be unsuccessful at their intended role, and instead became an environmental threat at a range of Australian coastal locations and in some inland areas.

Populations of introduced common mynas are found in many parts of the world including South Africa, New Zealand, and numerous pacific islands. The species has pushed native birds towards extinction in Polynesia, Hawaii, and Mauritius. In 2000 the World Conservation Union acknowledged their threat on an international scale, listing them in the top 100 invasive species of the world. Common mynas nest in hollows and have been known to evict native birds such as rosellas and even kookaburras. Over the past 20 years common mynas have quadrupled their range along Australia's eastern seaboard.

A medium-sized, chocolate brown bird, the species has a black head and neck and a yellow beak, eye patch, feet and legs. Unlike many other birds the myna walks – rather than hops – when moving along the ground.

WHY ARE MYNAS A THREAT TO THE SUPERB PARROT?

Recent surveys of common myna populations indicate the birds are spreading out from established populations in Canberra towards Superb Parrot habitat to the north. As the common myna competes with native birds for nesting hollows, there is concern it may soon pose a threat to the Superb Parrot. It could also impact on other hollow-dependent species such as squirrel gliders. In a landscape where hollows are rare and limiting population growth for threatened species, competition from common mynas could have a major impact on native birds and animals.

WHAT'S BEING DONE?

Australian National University researcher Dr Chris Tidemann has worked with Environment ACT to trial a trapping mechanism for common mynas at feeding areas. Funding from the NSW Department of Environment & Conservation, the Hermon Slade Foundation and the Australian Government's Natural Heritage Trust has recently been provided to help Dr Tidemann conduct trials of trapping mynas at communal roosts in Cairns (tropical) and Canberra (temperate).

Councils and community groups along the eastern coast are setting up hotline numbers to track the spread of the bird. In Albury Wodonga, which is currently free of the pest, a 'wanted' poster encourages reported sightings.

In addition travellers have been asked not to leave food scraps along roadsides, as this may help the birds' travel. The Central Coast Indian Myna Action Group is also raising awareness of the threat and is developing eradication programs in the local area.

Photo: Andrew Tatnell

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Find out whether a common myna reporting scheme has been established in your local area
- Report any population changes to local council, your state or territory conservation agency or local bird club
- Help reduce other threats to woodland birds by getting involved in conserving their woodland habitat. For more information contact your Threatened Species Network Coordinator or local state or territory conservation agency.

CONTACT AND REFERENCES

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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.

- Pell, A.S. and Tidemann, C.R. (1997). The ecology of the common myna *(Acridotheres tristis)* in urban nature reserves in the Australian Capital Territory. EMU 97: 141-149.
- Pell, A.S. and Tidemann, C.R. (1997). The impact of two exotic hollow-nesting birds on two native parrots in savannah and woodland in eastern Australia. Biological Conservation 79: 145-153.

Threatened Species Network

Australian Government

WWF

The Threatened Species Network is a community-based program of the Australian Government & WWF-Australia.