

## Mallee Emu-wren (*Stipiturus mallee*)



Above: Female Mallee Emu-wren. Photo: Rohan Clarke.

**This fact sheet summarises background information about the Mallee Emu-wren (*Stipiturus mallee*).**

### **Description**

The species is one of Australia's smallest birds weighing only 4-6.5 grams. It has a long filamentous tail that looks like emu feathers, giving the species its name. The male has a distinctive blue bib on its breast and a rufous crown, whilst the female is much plainer. They have small, rounded wings that enable them to scurry between the dense fronds of *Triodia*, which they depend on for foraging and building their nest in. However they

are poor fliers and rarely fly higher than one meter and are thought to be poor dispersers. They have a high pitched weak call that sounds like an insect, making them difficult to hear.

### **Ecology**

The Mallee Emu-wren is thought to feed on insects, foraging mainly from the stems of *Triodia* tussocks (Porcupine Grass) and from the twigs of small (50cm tall) shrubs. Mallee Emu-wrens move around in small groups of about four to eight individuals during the winter months. At the onset of the breeding season in July they form breeding pairs



Above: Habitat of Mallee Emu-wren. Photo: Sarah Brown.



### At a glance

- The Mallee Emu-wren is listed as nationally endangered under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.
- They are very a tiny wren-like bird weighing only 4 to 6.5 grams and prefer vegetation types that contain *Triodia*.
- Estimated total population size of Mallee Emu-wrens is around 15,000 birds.

and maintain home ranges of about three to five hectares. They build a domed nest in the centre of a mature *Triodia* made from plant fibres, spider webs, feathers and other soft material. They usually lay three eggs in a clutch, but may lay multiple clutches in good years and not breed at all in poor years.

### **Habitat**

The Mallee Emu-wren is a nationally endangered Australian bird only found in the Murray-Darling Basin of Victoria and South Australia, south of the Murray River. Past broad-scale clearance of land for agriculture has caused the decline of many mallee animals, including the Mallee Emu-wren. They are currently found only in the major conservation reserves of the region. The Mallee Emu-wren occupies mallee-*Triodia* and *Triodia*-heath vegetation types. These vegetation types consist of a dense understorey of *Triodia* with or without small shrubs and heaths.

### **Fire – friend and foe**

Fire is an essential feature of Mallee ecosystems and plays a major role in the distribution and abundance of the Mallee Emu-wren. In mallee-*Triodia* vegetation types, Mallee Emu-wrens are found to prefer vegetation types that contain *Triodia* that hasn't been burned for 16 or more years. Once this vegetation reaches 30 years post fire it becomes less suitable for Mallee Emu-wrens as the *Triodia* breaks down. While Mallee Emu-wrens require periodic fires to maintain habitat suitability, large or frequent fires can be detrimental. A series of very large wildfires has contributed to major declines of Mallee Emu-wrens within Ngarkat



Above: Habitat of Mallee Emu-wren. Inset: Mallee Emu-wren in spinifex. Photos: Sarah Brown.

and Billiatt Conservation Parks in South Australia and possibly the Big Desert Wilderness Park in Victoria.

### **A matter of survival**

The Mallee Emu-wren is listed as nationally vulnerable under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. A number of threats to the Mallee Emu-wren have been identified and include:

- Too frequent and extensive wildfires destroying key habitat;
- Climate fluctuations such as rainfall and temperature influencing breeding success;
- Habitat fragmentation caused by clearing and extensive wildfires;
- Isolation of small populations exposing them to high risk of extinction;
- Decline in habitat quality caused by grazing herbivores, including domestic stock, native species and feral animals.

### **How can you help?**

The Mallee CMA encourages the community to assist the recovery of Mallee Emu-wrens by:

- Supporting the control of feral animals including foxes, cats, and goats;
- Sticking to existing tracks and roads while travelling through National Parks and reserves;
- Restoring habitat by planting locally indigenous species;
- Removing grazing pressure from native vegetation by excluding stock.

### **Find out more**


The Mallee CMA has undertaken a number of surveys to help establish the current distribution and habitat requirements of Mallee Emu-wrens within the Victorian Mallee. For further information on current surveys please contact the Mallee CMA on 03 5051 4377 or refer to the Technical Bulletins featured on the Mallee CMA website at [www.malleecma.vic.gov.au](http://www.malleecma.vic.gov.au)

## **Project Partners**



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