

Six birds missing, presumed extinct

Australia has lost 25 per cent more birds than previously thought, according to a recent research review.



Credit: Stephen Garnett

The six 'missing' birds are the white-breasted white-eye from Norfolk Island, whose disappearance was caused by rat predation; the western Victorian form of the pied currawong and the hooded robin from the Tiwi Islands, both decimated by changes in fire management practices; the thick-billed grasswren from Alice Springs and the southern form of the star finch that once occurred from Townsville to northern NSW, which were both affected by overgrazing; and the spotted quail-thrush from the Mt Lofty Ranges in South Australia, which was driven to probable extinction by habitat fragmentation.

'It's a tragedy we might have prevented, had only we realised how scarce these birds were,' says Professor Stephen Garnett from Charles Darwin University, who led the study.

'We were worried about these birds when we last reviewed their status ten years ago. Sadly, despite concerted efforts, no sign of these birds has turned up in the past decade.'

The grasswren and the currawong probably disappeared in the early 20th century, he says, but all of the others were alive in the 1980s. The robin and finch were last seen in the early 1990s, when large-scale surveys highlighted the need for urgent action to save threatened species.

