

Black-throated finch (southern)

Poephila cincta cincta



The black-throated finch is a small, native, seed-eating bird that was once common in grassy woodlands from Cape York Peninsula and the Gulf country to north-eastern New South Wales.

Unfortunately, in the last 20 years, its range has contracted by 80 per cent due to overgrazing by animals, drought, illegal trapping and urban sprawl. Numbers of the species has also declined greatly and the distinctive southern form is now only found in very few locations.

The Townsville region is one area where a small number of southern black-throated finches still exist.

Species Description

The black-throated finch is a small (9-11 cm long), sleek and stocky bird. They have a thick, black bill and a black eye line that makes them appear to be wearing “wrap around sunglasses”. They have a pale blue-grey head, cinnamon-brown body, short black tail and distinct black “bib” which extends down to the breast, earning them the nickname “Parson Finch”.

The black-throated finch lives in grassy woodlands of eucalyptus, melaleucas and acacia near water. They feed off grass seeds, and can often be seen perched in trees or feeding on the ground amongst native grasses in small flocks or pairs. They build bottle-shaped nests from grass in tall shrubs and tree hollows.

The finch is a communal bird. Males and females form strong bonds and are rarely seen apart. When conditions are right the pair can breed throughout the year but in the Townsville region most breeding happens in the first six months of the year.



Range

The black-throated finch historically occurred from north-eastern New South Wales to Atherton Tablelands, however very few have been sighted south of the tropics since the late 1970s.

Over the last 20 years, there has been a contraction in range by 80 per cent. The black-throated finch is essentially considered extinct from New South Wales.

It is currently limited in range, with the Townsville region being one of the few areas the species can still be found throughout the year. Known sites in the region include Ross Dam, Serpentine Lagoon and Oak Valley.



Decline

Evidence suggests that over the last 20 years there has been an overall population decline of more than 50 per cent.

The most probable reasons for population and range decline are unclear, but current threats include; clearing, grazing (cattle and rabbits), predation by introduced mammals (fox and feral cat) and changes in fire regime. The species is also present in local bird trade (known as 'Chocolate Parson') and capture of wild populations for this purpose may be damaging to local stock.

Legal Status of the Black-throated finch (southern)

The current conservation status of the Black-throated finch (southern) (*Poephila cincta cincta*), under Australian and State/Territory government legislation is as follows:

National: Endangered under the Environmental Protection & Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999
Queensland: Vulnerable under the Nature Conservation Act 1992
New South Wales: Endangered under the Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995

What is being done to protect the finch?

Work is being done to protect the bird's habitat and raise awareness of the species. A detailed Recovery Plan for the southern sub-species was approved by the Federal Minister for the Environment in 2008.

The Black-throated Finch Recovery Team was formed in 2002 to address the conservation needs of the bird. Based in Townsville, the Black-throated Finch Recovery Team is a national group of volunteers and government agencies that gather detailed information on the size and location of the remaining populations of the finch in the region.



What can you do to protect the finch?

If you see the black-throated finch, record the precise location and, if possible, the number of birds. Please report your sightings and direct enquiries to:

Bernie Davis, Co-ordinator
Black-throated Finch Recovery Team
Telephone: 07 4788 9904
bushlandbeach@bigpond.com

Sightings of the bird can also be reported on the BTFRT website:
www.blackthroatedfinch.com