

Paddocks for Plains-wanderers

Incentive project 2021-22



Local Land
Services



Australian Government

National
Landcare
Program



About the Plains-wanderer

The Plains-wanderer is a small ground-dwelling bird that can be found in the sparse native grasslands of the Riverina.

They have a yellow bill and legs, and feathers that are fawn in colour with black rosettes. The sexes differ in appearance, with the female being slightly larger and she has a black and white collar above a red breast patch.

They are well camouflaged and quite cryptic — they may be on your property, but are hard to spot.

Where do they live?

Plains-wanderers require specific habitat conditions, with a certain amount of ground cover density and grass height. Plains-wanderers prefer sparse native grasslands, which typically occur on hard red soils. An open grassland structure with around 60% bare ground allows birds to easily move about, find seeds and insects to eat, and to detect and slip away from predators like foxes. This is what is referred to as 'ideal'.

During drought periods where there is low rainfall and continuous grazing, habitat can become too sparse and short. At the other extreme, periods of high rainfall and extended wet conditions can result in habitat becoming too tall and dense. Plains-wanderers will move away from habitat that becomes too bare or too thick.

The distribution of Plains-wanderers was formerly more widespread, but are now only found in areas within south-eastern Australia. The grasslands of the western Riverina and Hay plains have been recognised as a "hotspot" for the species.

Why do they need our help?

The last couple of decades in the NSW Riverina have been tough for Plains-wanderers. There have been long dry periods and some very wet years. This has meant that large areas of habitat have often been too sparse or too thick to support birds, which has caused a steep decline in Plains-wanderer numbers and which has now resulted in being classed as Critically Endangered at a national-level.

There is estimated to be only 300 Plains-wanderers left in the Riverina. When animal populations become small they are at risk of extinction. To avoid extinction, we need to increase the size of the Plains-wanderer population, and prevent it from ever again falling to dangerously low levels.



What is being done to help?

This project differs from other programs in that it is attempting to work across the landscape to secure an entire population of a species, and aims for a shift in management practices that will endure irrespective of changing government policies and programs.

There are various programs being run concurrently to reverse the long-term population trend of decline and increase the numbers of Plains-wanderers to a level where there is a viable wild population.

Within NSW, these programs include:

- the Paddocks for Plains-wanderers incentive project for landholders
- feral animal control on a landscape scale
- captive breeding programs at various zoos throughout south-east Australia to establish a captive assurance population and provide birds to support recovery
- purchase and management of Oolambeyan National Park by the NSW Government
- Long term monitoring of Plains-wanderer numbers.

Paddocks for Plains-wanderer incentive project

The Paddocks for Plains-wanderers incentive project is one project that is part of a broader program to secure Plains-wanderers in the Riverina.

Landholders play a key role in preserving habitat for this species, as strategic grazing management is crucial to conserving their ideal habitat.

What can landholders do to help the Plains-wanderer?

The most important thing landholders can do is to manage their habitat in 'ideal' conditions. Ideal habitat has roughly equal parts bare ground and plants, with most of the plants being herbs and grasses around five centimetres tall plus a scattering of taller plants.

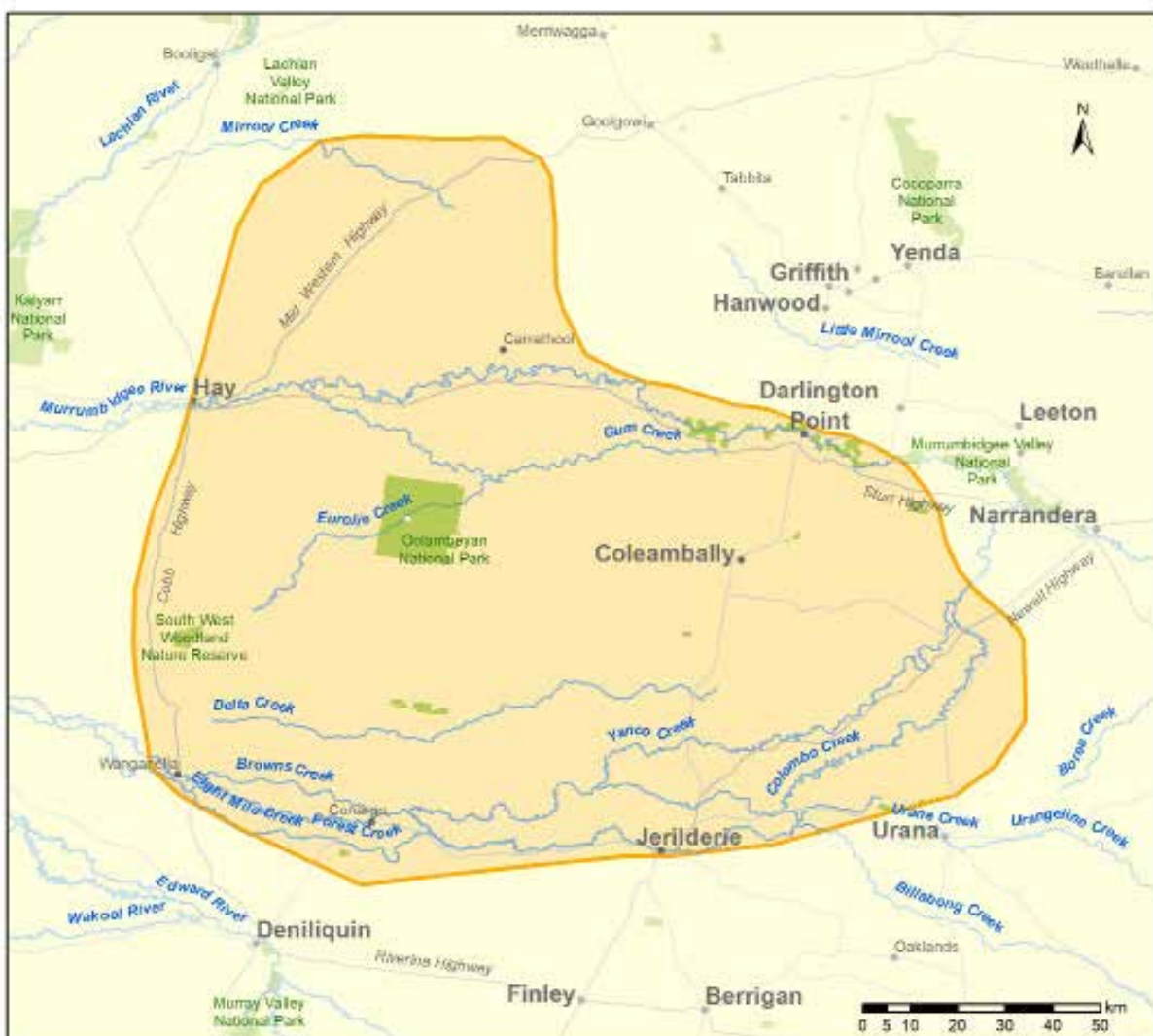
Grazing is an important tool for achieving this outcome. In some cases, no change to the current grazing regime will be required.

In others, landholders will need to reduce grazing pressure in dry years or increase grazing pressure in wet years. The most critical times are during drought, when paddocks may need to be destocked completely for extended periods.

What assistance is available?

The project aims to provide the types of support that landholders require to maintain habitat. As such, we can tailor support packages to the circumstances of individual landholders.

This project is supported by Riverina Local Land Services and Murray Local Land Services, through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program and the NSW Government's Saving our Species program.



Funding to protect Plains-wanderers

Funding is available for:

- **Stock proof fencing:** Erect new fencing or repair existing fencing to aid in grazing management. Permanent and temporary fencing will be considered.
- **Stock watering points:** Funding towards new, or re-location of existing, watering points away from the habitat to discourage grazing pressure on primary habitat.
- **Saltbush planting:** Direct seeding of saltbush may be utilised during dry periods to reduce grazing pressure on primary habitat. These plantings will not be funded within paddocks containing primary habitat.
- **Stock Management Areas:** Stock Management Areas (SMAs) or containment areas can be implemented to limit grazing pressure, and may include funding for permanent fencing materials, and infrastructure that assists feeding and water. A one-day Stock Plan or similar course must be completed by the landholder.
- **Other feeding infrastructure:** Tools such as lick feeders or feed trailers may be partially funded to allow stock to be fed away from habitat. **Boxthorn control:** Initial Boxthorn removal using various methods will be funded with the paddocks containing primary habitat. Boxthorn must be destroyed outside of the habitat area.
- **Fox baiting (1080):** Free baits can be funded over the entire property at least twice a year. Landholders carrying out baiting must have current pesticides use training accreditation.
- **Rabbit control:** Infestation will be assessed, with baiting, ripping and fumigation considered as control options. The control may be funded within the habitat and within a two kilometre radius.
- **Secondary control mechanism for pests:** A set amount per year is available to landholders to use secondary control methods to further reduce pest animals on their property.
- **Flexible incentive options:** If you have specific requirements for your property that are not currently listed, please contact your local Plains-wanderer Project Officer below for a discussion about other incentives that may be included.

Key requirements if you would like to get involved

- Existing primary habitat must be mapped on your property or a project officer must have assessed this.
- The primary habitat must be greater than 100 hectares and within the project area (see map).
- All previous works funded by Local Land Services or Catchment Management Authority must be completed and maintained.
- You must have no outstanding debts to Local Land Services.
- You must be willing to enter into a contractual agreement with Local Land Services and maintain the primary habitat and incentives funded under the program for 10 years.
- Works will need to be completed within 12 months from date of signing the agreement.
- You must have public liability insurance for a minimum of \$10 million to be considered for funding.
- Allow project staff access to nominated paddocks to conduct monitoring of habitat, bird populations or infrastructure.
- Landholder agrees to use the Plains-wanderer Habitat Management Guide to graze paddock(s) to 'ideal' condition.

Contact your closest Project Officer

Riverina Local Land Services

For landholders near Griffith and Carrathool

- Megan Purvis (0428 941 061 or megan.purvis@lls.nsw.gov.au)

For landholders near Hay and Boorooban

- Cassandra Hooke (0427 632 561 or cassandra.hooke@lls.nsw.gov.au)

Murray Local Land Services

For landholders near Jerilderie

- Shanna Rogers (0457 733 261 or shanna.rogers@lls.nsw.gov.au)