

Nationally threatened species and ecological communities

AUSTRALIAN PAINTED SNIPE (*Rostratula australis*)

The Australian Painted Snipe has been listed as a vulnerable species under the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). It is also listed as a migratory species under the EPBC Act, as it is listed in the China–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement (CAMBA).

The Australian Painted Snipe has also been referred to as the Painted Snipe or Greater Painted Snipe, *Rostratula benghalensis* or *Rostratula benghalensis australis*, as it was previously considered to be part of the Greater Painted Snipe species that occurs also in Africa and Asia. Recent research indicates that the Australian Painted Snipe is a separate species. This taxonomic history is reflected in the names that have been used to list the species under State and Territory threatened species legislation, under CAMBA and under the migratory provisions of the EPBC Act.

What does an Australian Painted Snipe look like?

The Australian Painted Snipe is a stocky wading bird around 220-250 mm in length with a long pinkish bill. The adult female, more colourful than the male, has a chestnut-coloured head, with white around the eye and a white crown stripe, and metallic green back and wings, barred with black and chestnut. There is a pale stripe extending from the shoulder into a V down its upper back. The adult male is similar to the female, but smaller and duller with buff spots on the wings.

Where does the Australian Painted Snipe live?

The Australian Painted Snipe is usually found in shallow inland wetlands, either freshwater or brackish, that are either permanently or temporarily filled. It is a cryptic bird that is hard to see and often overlooked. Usually only single birds are seen, though larger groups of up to 30 have been recorded. It nests on the ground amongst tall reed-like vegetation near water, and feeds near the water's edge and on mudflats, taking invertebrates, such as insects and worms, and seeds.

The species has a scattered distribution throughout many parts of Australia, with a single record from Tasmania. Though some individuals are apparently resident in some areas, other individuals appear to be nomadic, temporarily occupying areas where suitable habitat exists. The Murray–Darling drainage system appears to have been a key area for this species, as many records of this species come from this region.

Although the Australian Painted Snipe can occur across Australia, the areas of most sensitivity to the species are those wetlands where the birds frequently occur and are known to breed.

Why is the Australian Painted Snipe threatened?

Current knowledge of the Australian Painted Snipe indicates that:

- It has always only occurred in limited numbers in Australia, but substantial declines in numbers have been noted since European settlement, in particular, over the last 30-50 years.
- It is probable that the loss and alteration of wetland habitat since European settlement is a key factor in the species decline, particularly in the Murray–Darling Basin, an area known to be important to the Australian Painted Snipe.

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What other laws currently protect the Australian Painted Snipe?

In addition to the listing of the Australian Painted Snipe as a nationally threatened and migratory species under the EPBC Act, the species is listed as:

- vulnerable in New South Wales (*Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995*);
- rare in Queensland (*Nature Conservation Act 1992*);
- rare in South Australia (*National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972*);
- threatened in Victoria (*Fauna and Flora Guarantee Act 1988*);
- rare or likely to become extinct in Western Australia (*Wildlife Conservation Act 1950*); and
- vulnerable in the Northern Territory (*Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 2000*).

The level of protection given to the Australian Painted Snipe under each State and Territory laws varies between jurisdictions.

What are the implications of listing the Australian Painted Snipe as a nationally threatened species under the EPBC Act?

Listing of the Australian Painted Snipe as a nationally threatened species under the EPBC Act means that any action that is likely to have a significant impact on the species will need to be referred to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage for a decision as to whether assessment and approval is required.

It is an offence for any person to undertake an action that is likely to have a significant impact on a matter of national environmental significance (including a nationally listed threatened species) without approval.

Since the commencement of the EPBC Act in July 2000, the Australian Painted Snipe has been similarly protected as a migratory species listed under the EPBC Act. Migratory species are also matters of national environmental significance.

Guidelines have been produced to assist people to identify whether their activity is likely to have a significant impact on a nationally listed species. These guidelines – *EPBC Act Administrative Guidelines on Significance July 2000* – can be obtained from the Australian Government's Department of the Environment and Heritage website or by contacting the Department.

Activities that interfere with places where Australian Painted Snipe gather to breed or feed, particularly in the Murray–Darling Basin, may require referral under the EPBC Act. Examples of these activities may include the construction of weirs or dams that are likely to change the wetland ecology, draining of wetlands or clearing the reed-like vegetation around wetlands where the Australian Painted Snipe may nest.

Individuals and organisations should consider the particular facts and circumstances of their activities in deciding whether there is a need to make a referral under the EPBC Act. You must make a referral for an activity if you think it may be likely to have a significant impact on the species.

It should also be noted that it is an offence to kill, injure, take, trade, keep or move a member of a listed threatened species on Commonwealth land without a permit. For information on permits, see the Department of the Environment and Heritage website.

How does this decision affect current activities?

The EPBC Act allows for some exemptions to the requirement for assessment and approval. Any actions or activities you undertake, which involve a use of land (including water bodies), do not require assessment or approval if you meet the following requirements.

Exemption due to prior authorisation

- your action or activities were specifically authorised by a permit, or other authorisation, issued under an Australian Government, State or Territory law before 16 July 2000; and
- on 15 July 2000 (immediately before the EPBC Act started) you did not need any further permits or other authorisations to carry out your action or activity in compliance with all relevant environmental laws.

Exemption due to lawful continuation of land use

- you started your action or activity before 16 July 2000;
- your action or activity does not have, and does not require, any permit or other authorisation to be carried out in compliance with all relevant laws; and
- your action or activity has continued in the same location without any enlargement, expansion or intensification.

Please note that an EPBC Act approval does not remove the need to obtain the necessary State or Territory government authorisations or other Australian Government authorisations, including permits under the EPBC Act, for an activity.

Where can I get further information?

Administrative Guidelines regarding what constitutes a 'significant impact', referral forms and a guide for submitting a referral can be obtained from the Australian Government's Department of the Environment and Heritage website at www.deh.gov.au/epbc or by contacting the Department's Community Information Unit on 1800 803 772.

A copy of the criteria used to list the Australian Painted Snipe under the EPBC Act as well as the listing advice can also be obtained from the Department of the Environment and Heritage website at www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/nominations/index.html.

Funding for projects to recover threatened species and ecological communities is available through the Threatened Species Network Community Grants, which are normally opened for application in autumn each year. More information is available at www.wwf.org.au/tsn. Small community based projects may also be eligible for funding under Envirofund grants; more information on these grants is available at www.nht.gov.au/envirofund.



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You may also wish to participate in the development and implementation of your region's Natural Resource Management Plan. In this case, contact your local land management agency.

Further information on the Australian Painted Snipe may also be obtained from:

The websites of the following organisations

- Department of the Environment and Heritage – Action Plans and Conservation Overviews
- NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service
- Birds Australia

The following publications

- Garnett, S.T., & G.M. Crowley. 2000. *The Action Plan for Australian Birds 2000*. Environment Australia, Canberra.
- Marchant, S. & Higgins, P.J. (eds) 1993. *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds*. Vol. 2. Raptors to Lapwings. Oxford University Press, Melbourne.
- New South Wales National Parks & Wildlife Service. 1999. *Threatened Species Information Sheet – Painted Snipe*. NPWS, Hurstville.3

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