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## **Plains-wanderer party: could this endangered species be on the rise in South Australia?**

National conservation not-for-profit Bush Heritage Australia has recorded eleven critically endangered Plains-wanderers on its Boolcoomatta Reserve, Adnyamathanha and Wilyakali Country in South Australia during the most recent survey.

This number is the largest documented at any one time since Bush Heritage purchased the reserve in 2006 and is the latest in a string of good news for the species typically known for its threatened species status and being notoriously difficult to spot.

The recordings were made during a recent field trip with Bush Heritage ecologist Graeme Finlayson and PhD student Saskia Gerhardy, and follows recent national headlines of a separate major Plains-wanderer bird breeding event in Victoria. According to Graeme Finlayson, there are various signs that the species is also improving in South Australia in response to recent wet weather.

“Four months after the drought broke we started picking up calls on our song meters, and in October last year, we started noticing a ridiculous amount of Plains-wanderer calls on our song meter grid at Boolcoomatta, including breeding calls,” said Graeme.

“I’ve spent years searching for Plains-wanderers at Boolcoomatta and I’ve never seen anything like this number of birds. It is glaringly obvious that they are responding to the recent favourable conditions.”

The Plains-wanderer is a small quail-like, ground-dwelling bird that is endemic to Australia and the only member of the *Pedionomidae* family, an unusual genetic lineage of birds that evolved in Gondwana over 100 million years ago.

Once widespread throughout the lowland native grasslands of coastal and subcoastal eastern Australia, the onset of widespread cultivation and agriculture has led to the loss of much of the Plains-wanderer’s habitat.

There are little over 1000 Plains-wanderers thought to be left in the wild, with under 10% of that population estimated to be living in South Australia. With less than 85 confirmed sightings in South Australia since 1840, little is known about the species residency within the state.

PhD student Saskia Gerhardy is investigating the status and distribution of Plains-wanderers throughout South Australia and was able to capture eight of the birds during this trip for genetic sampling.

“Despite being a critically endangered species, there is still so much we still don’t know about Plains-wanderers, especially in South Australia. Through the research we are conducting at Boolcoomatta we can start to better understand their behaviour, preference in habitat, and responses to factors such as predation and drought,” said Saskia Gerhardy.

The results of Saskia’s research at Boolcoomatta will help inform a national program to assist

recovery efforts for the iconic species, alongside the national Plains-wanderer Recovery Team and other partners.

Recent rains have also led to an increase in other bird species at Boolcoomatta including Inland Dotterels, Little Button Quails and Stubble Quails.

Boolcoomatta is a 63,000-hectare nature reserve on Adnyamathanha and Wilyakali Country 100km west of Broken Hill that is managed by Bush Heritage Australia. It boasts sweeping plains of saltbush shrublands and ephemeral wetlands and supports species such as Yellow-footed Rock Wallabies, Emus and White-winged Fairywrens.

**Bush Heritage Australia** is a unified force for nature, grounded in science and culture to nurture all land for life. We work across more than 11.3 million hectares, protecting and building resilience in our landscapes for the almost 2,000 animals and plants on Australia's threatened species list.

We respect, listen and learn from working side-by-side with Traditional Owners, and by working in partnerships with pastoralists and other organisations to have the most impact. Together, we're returning the bush to good health.



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photos of the Plains-wanderers recorded at Boolcoomatta.