

Australian Capital Territory

# Nature Conservation (Brown Treecreeper) Conservation Advice 2019

Notifiable instrument NI2019–247

made under the

**Nature Conservation Act 2014, s 90C (Conservation advice)**

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**1 Name of instrument**

This instrument is the *Nature Conservation (Brown Treecreeper) Conservation Advice 2019*.

**2 Commencement**

This instrument commences on the day after its notification day.

**3 Conservation advice for the Brown Treecreeper**

Schedule 1 sets out the conservation advice for the Brown Treecreeper (*Climacteris picumnus victoricae*).

Arthur Georges  
Chair, Scientific Committee  
1 May 2019

# Schedule 1

(see s 3)

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**ACT**  
Government

Environment, Planning and  
Sustainable Development



ACT Scientific  
Committee

# CONSERVATION ADVICE

## BROWN TREECREEPER

### *Climacteris picumnus victoriae*

#### CONSERVATION STATUS

The Brown Treecreeper *Climacteris picumnus victoriae* Matthews, 1912 is recognised as threatened in the following jurisdictions:

National	<b>Near Threatened</b> , Action Plan for Australian Birds 2010
ACT	<b>Vulnerable</b> , <i>Nature Conservation Act 2014</i>
NSW	<b>Vulnerable</b> , <i>Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016</i>
Victoria	<b>Near Threatened</b> , Advisory List of Threatened Vertebrate Fauna 2013

#### ELIGIBILITY

The factors that make the Brown Treecreeper eligible for listing as Vulnerable in the ACT Threatened Native Species List are included in the Listing Background section below.

#### DESCRIPTION AND ECOLOGY

The Brown Treecreeper is the largest species of Australia's treecreepers, measuring about 16–18 cm and weighing (on average) 31.5 g. It is mostly pale brown in plumage. The head, throat and upper breast are pale greyish-brown, while the lower breast and belly are strongly streaked with black and buff. In flight, a buff stripe can be seen in the wing.

The sexes are similar, except females have rufous edges to the feathers of the upper breast, while in the male these edges are black. Juveniles resemble the adults, but are duller, have less obvious stripes on the underparts and the lower belly is a pale rufous colour. (Birdlife Australia 2018).

The Brown Treecreeper (south-eastern) *Climacteris picumnus victoriae* is the sub-species resident in the ACT. This sub-species *C. p. victoriae* and *C. p. picumnus* are distinguished by colour differences on the face, body and tail markings. The two sub-species grade into each other through central NSW. Individuals are active, noisy and conspicuous, and give a loud 'pink' call. This call is often repeated in contact, and sometimes given in a series of five to ten descending notes.



Adult Brown Treecreeper (Tobias Hayashi – Canberra Birds)

Breeding occurs from July to February across its range (OEH 2017). The nest is a collection of grasses, feathers and other soft material, placed in a suitable tree hollow or similar site. Both sexes build the nest but the female alone incubates the eggs. Pairs often have two broods during each breeding season. Occasionally, other individuals assist the breeding pair with building the nest and feeding young (Birdlife Australia 2018).

The Brown Treecreeper climbs up the trunks and branches of trees in search of food, usually in pairs or small groups. It probes into cavities and under loose bark with its long downward curving bill. In this way it searches for insects and their larvae with the most favoured insects being ants. Feeding can also take place on the ground on fallen logs or by diving on ground-dwelling prey from a perch (Birdlife Australia 2018).

## DISTRIBUTION AND HABITAT

Three sub-species of *Climacteris picumnus* are recognised: *C. p. melanotus* (Cape York Peninsula, Queensland), *C. p. picumnus* (inland eastern Australia, eastern Queensland) and *C. p. victoriae* (south-eastern Australia) (Schodde and Mason 1999; Garnett and Crowley 2000).

The south-eastern sub-species *C. p. victoriae* is the breeding resident of the ACT. Nationally, this sub-species has an estimated extent of occurrence of 600,000 km<sup>2</sup> and area of occupancy of 12,000 km<sup>2</sup>. However, a substantial decline in the distribution is likely to be occurring given the loss and fragmentation of habitat (Garnett et al. 2011). The species is found in sub-coastal environments and the inland slopes of the Great Dividing Range from the Grampians in western Victoria, through central New South Wales (Wagga Wagga, Temora, Forbes, Dubbo, and Inverell) to the Queensland border and north to the Bunya Mountains (Schodde and Mason 1999).

Within its range, the species is described as a common resident, provided habitat is suitable. Blakers et al. (1984) recorded densities of 0.04–0.50 birds/ha, however, large reductions in density have been reported over most parts of its range (Walters et al. 1999, Traill and Duncan 2000). The Brown Treecreeper has declined or disappeared from most remaining habitat fragments under 300 ha, at least partly, because females disperse from these areas or die preferentially and are not replaced (Walters et al. 1999). A decline of 70% was recorded in central New South Wales between 1990 and 2000 (Traill and Duncan 2000).

The Brown Treecreeper is likely to exist in isolated family groups in the ACT region in dry eucalypt woodlands and open forest below 1,000 m. It was once described as ‘fairly common from the lowlands to the alpine woodland’ in the ACT in the early 1950s (Cabby 2000). Taylor and COG (1992) reported it as relatively common in the Clear Range and along the Lower Naas River with other populations occurring at Campbell Park, Burbong, former quarries south of the airport, and Castle Hill, north of Tharwa. Surveys by the NSW NPWS in the late 1990s recorded the species at several remnant woodland and dry forest sites between Boorowa, Gunning and the ACT and at one site between Crookwell, Taralga, Collector and Tarago (ACT Government 1999).

There have been few sightings at Mulligans Flat Nature Reserve since 1999, where it was once common. Local extinction (Caswell Drive area on the western slopes of Black Mountain) (Marchant 1973) and decline in the Murrumbidgee River Corridor (Taylor 1987) have been documented. In 2003, the species was found in small numbers at Gooroo, Majura Field Firing Range and Newline quarry woodland (Cunningham 2003).

On Canberra Nature Map (CNM 2018) the Brown Treecreeper was recorded at Percival Hill, Mulligans Flat and Goorooyaroo in the north; Majura, Mount Ainslie, Gossan Hill, Kama, Jerrabomberra Grassland and Jerrabomberra (ACT) in central ACT areas; Namadgi National Park, Gigerline, Old Naas Travelling Stock Route, Booth and Tennent in the south; and in nearby NSW at Gundaroo, Googong Foreshore, Burra and Michelago. These were recorded between 2005 and 2018.

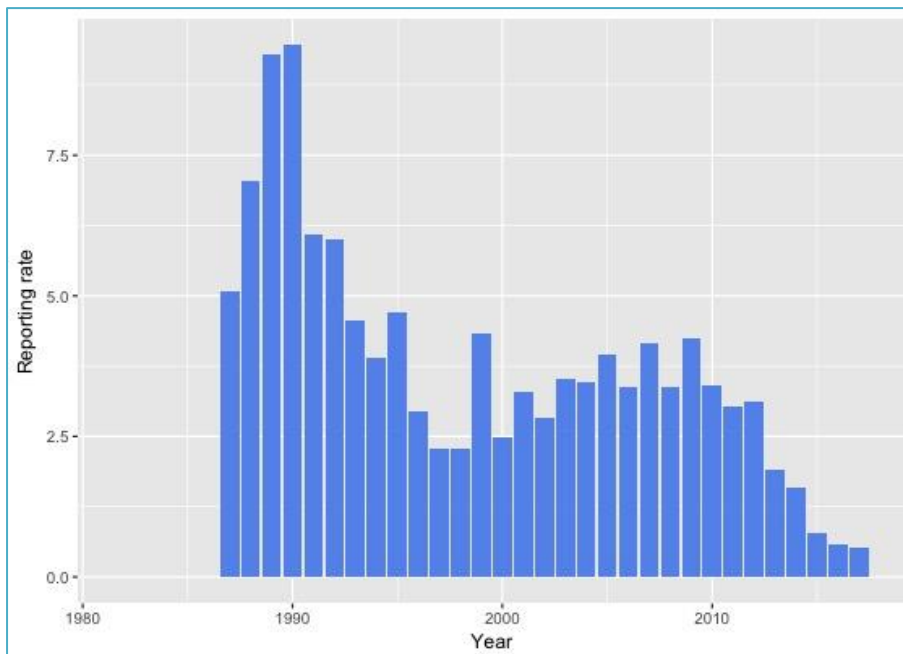
Brown Treecreepers were recorded nine times in the 2008 Bird Blitz (Allan 2009). Sightings were of single birds or groups of up to four birds, comprised two breeding records and were from Namadgi National Park, Castle Hill, Tharwa, Newline and Kama. Sightings of Brown Treecreepers then appeared to stabilise in the ACT region until 2008–2009, after which there was a steady and steep decline. An attempt was made to introduce 43 birds into woodlands inhabited formerly by the Brown Treecreeper. While the attempt failed it contributed to the scanty knowledge of reintroduction biology (Bennett et al. 2012). Therefore, there is a need to protect as much extant habitat as possible as reintroductions have not proved effective.

Between 2015 and 2017, the reporting rate levelled off, not far above zero per cent (COG 2018) (Figure 1). Most records of sightings in the ACT region (259 total birds (207 in 2015–2016)) were outside the ACT in 2016–2017 (COG 2018) (Figure 2 and Figure 3).

Critical habitat features required by the Brown Treecreeper include:

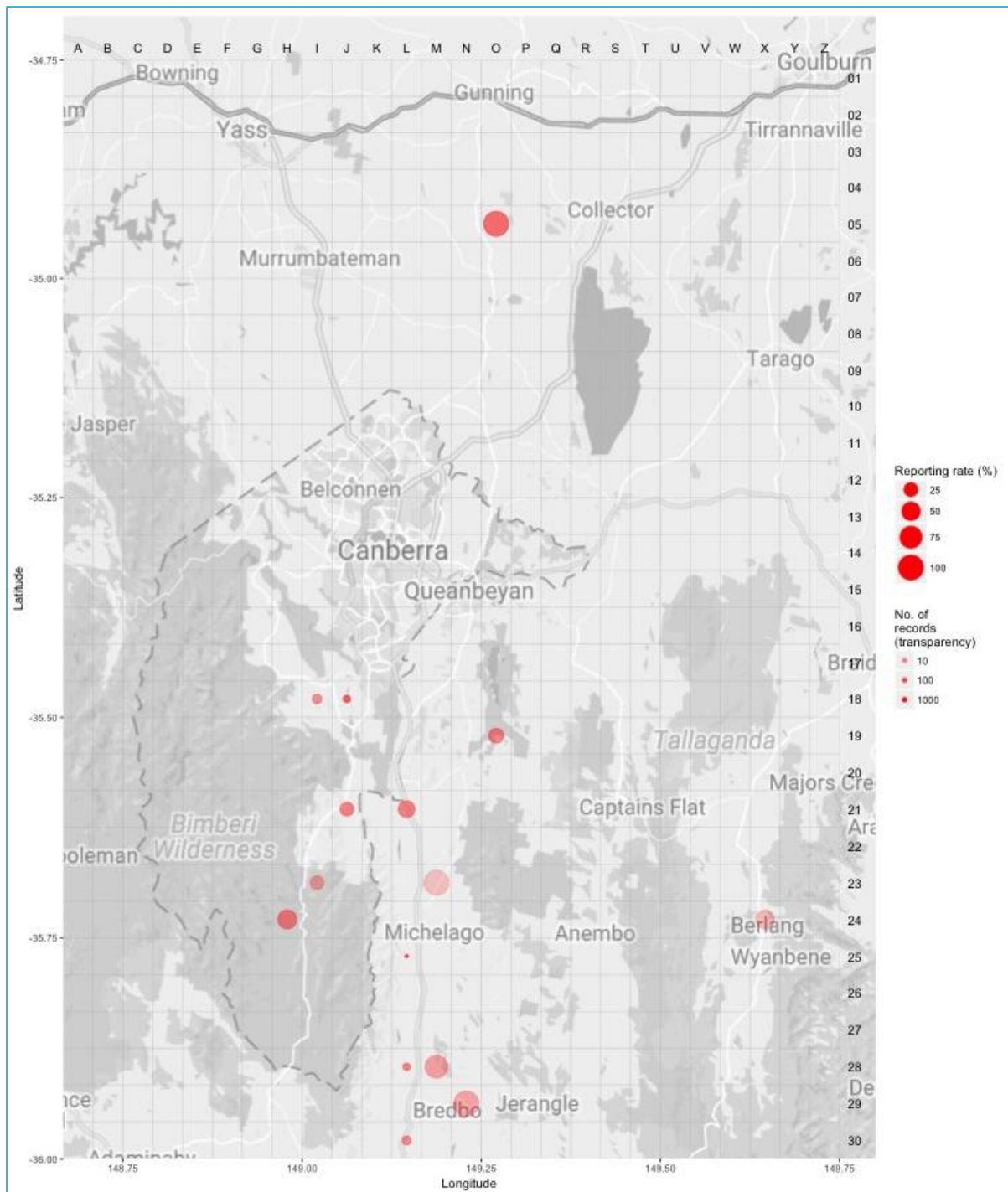
- relatively undisturbed grassy woodland with native understorey
- large living and dead trees which are essential for roosting and nesting sites and for foraging
- fallen timber which provides essential foraging habitat.

**Figure 1: Brown Treecreeper records in the ACT region – 1982–2017**



Source: *Canberrabirds.org.au*. (2018). Note: Reporting rate (%) is the proportion of all surveys in which the species was present. These data were collected by volunteer birdwatchers using various survey methods and on some occasions more than one person may have recorded bird sightings on the same day, which may skew the data.

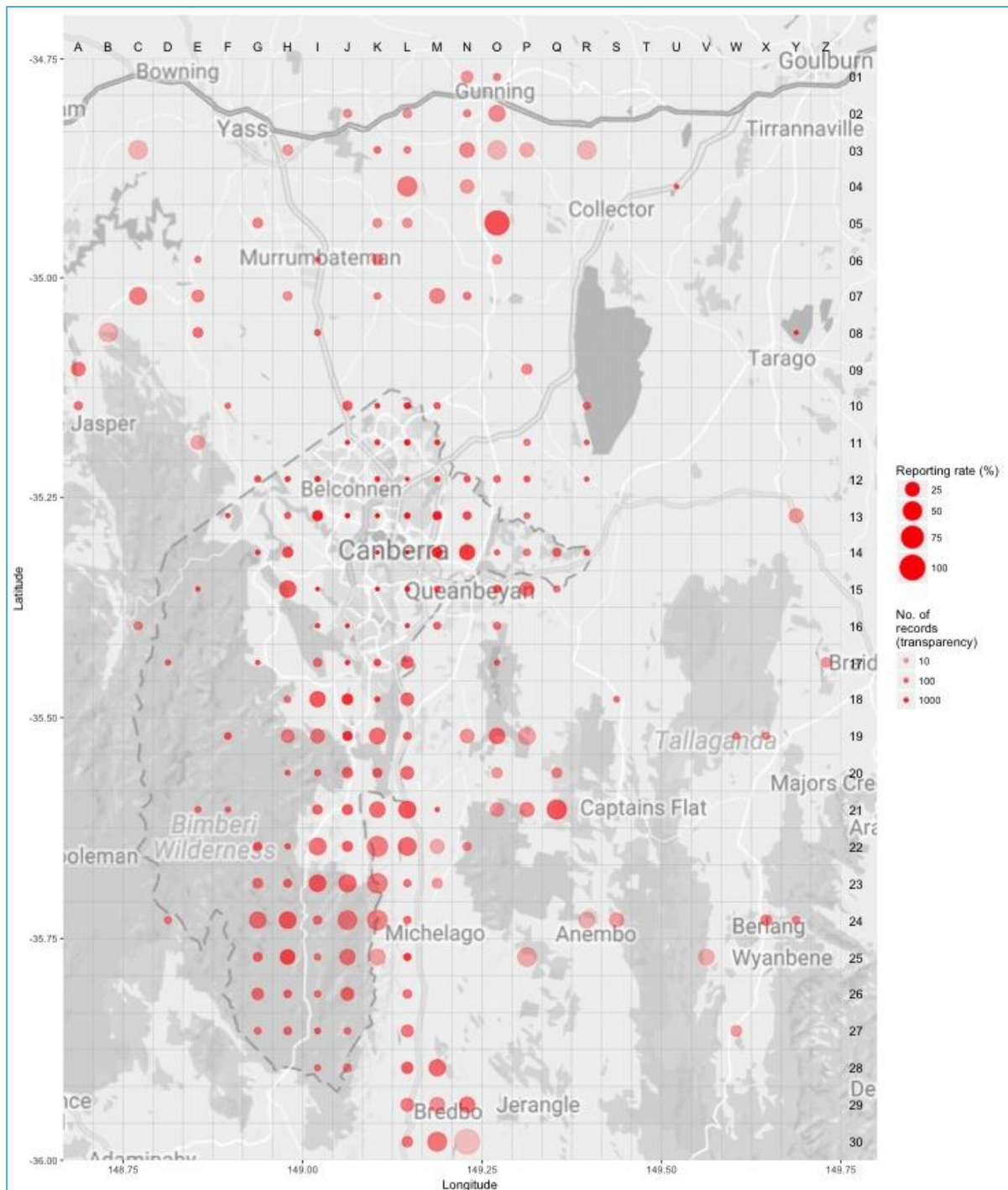
**Figure 2: Brown Treecreeper distribution in the ACT region – 2017**



Source: *Canberrabirds.org.au*. (2018). Note: Reporting rate (%) is the proportion of all surveys in which the species was present. These data were collected by volunteer birdwatchers using various survey methods and on some occasions more than one person may have recorded bird sightings on the same day, which may skew the data.



**Figure 3: Brown Treecreeper distribution in the ACT region – 1982–2017**



Source: [Canberrabirds.org.au](http://Canberrabirds.org.au). (2018). Note: Reporting rate (%) is the proportion of all surveys in which the species was present. These data were collected by volunteer birdwatchers using various survey methods and on some occasions more than one person may have recorded bird sightings on the same day, which may skew the data.

## THREATS

In common with many other threatened bird species, the principal threat to the Brown Treecreeper is a severe decline in the quality and quantity of its woodland habitat. In particular, the removal of timber for firewood is likely to result in local reduction of Brown Treecreeper numbers (ACT Government 2004). The fragmented nature of woodlands may present barriers to movement and recolonisation unless measures are taken to connect areas of viable habitat with existing populations.

Threats to the Brown Treecreeper (ACT Government 2004) include:

- removal of fallen timber and litter and inappropriate fire regimes
- predation by feral and/or uncontrolled domestic animals (foxes, dogs and cats)
- invasion of key habitats by introduced pasture and weeds
- uncontrolled grazing by livestock
- clearing of both living and dead trees
- rural tree dieback

## MAJOR CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES

The primary objective in the ACT is to protect Brown Treecreeper habitat through limiting clearance of suitable woodland habitat and prioritising conservation management to woodland patches, particularly those that are large or have complex habitat structure.

## CONSERVATION ISSUES AND PROPOSED MANAGEMENT ACTIONS

The conservation actions relevant to the Brown Treecreeper in the *ACT Lowland Woodland Conservation Strategy* (ACT Government 2004) include the following:

- protect habitat
- maintain and enhance connectivity
- limit removal of live and dead timber
- reduce intensive grazing
- maintain patches of shrubs or eucalypt regrowth
- regenerate habitat
- minimise adverse effects of fire
- minimise nest hollow competition.

## OTHER RELEVANT ADVICE, PLANS OR PRESCRIPTIONS

- ACT Woodland Conservation Strategy (ACT Government 2004)
- ACT Draft Woodland Conservation Strategy (ACT Government 2019)
- ACT Conservation Advice — Loss of Mature Trees (Scientific Committee 2018)

## LISTING BACKGROUND

The Brown Treecreeper was initially listed in the ACT as *Climacteris picumnus* as a Vulnerable species on 30 May 1997 in accordance with section 38 of the *Nature Conservation Act 1980*.

The Flora and Fauna Committee (now Scientific Committee) concluded that at that time the assessment satisfied the criteria:

- 2.2 The species is observed, estimated, inferred or suspected to be at risk of premature extinction in the ACT region in the medium-term future, as demonstrated by:
  - 2.2.1 Current serious decline in population or distribution from evidence based on:
    - 2.2.1.1 Direct observation, including comparison of historical and current records; and
    - 2.2.1.3 Serious decline in quality or quantity of habitat.

Under the *Nature Conservation Act 2014* it is possible to list at the sub-species level where there are differentiated threats across the species range. *Climacteris picumnus melanotus* (Cape York Peninsula, Queensland) and *C. p. picumnus* (inland eastern Australia, eastern Queensland) sub-species are not listed



as threatened in their range states. *Climacteris picumnus victoriae* is the only sub-species in the ACT and nearby NSW and is listed as Vulnerable in NSW and as Near Threatened in Victoria.

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## FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information can be obtained from the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (EPSDD). Phone: (02) 132281, EPSDD Website: <http://www.environment.act.gov.au/cpr>