

TAXON SUMMARY

Grey-headed Blackbird

(Island Thrush: Norfolk Island)

1	Family	Muscicapidae
2	Scientific name	<i>Turdus poliocephalus poliocephalus</i>
3	Common name	Grey-headed Blackbird
4	Conservation status	Extinct

5 Reasons for listing

Last seen 1975 and there have been no records since, despite searching.

6 Intraspecific taxa

Of the other two subspecies occurring in Australian territories, *T. p. vinitinctus* (Lord Howe I.) is Extinct and *T. p. erythropleurus* (Christmas I.) is Critically Endangered. At least another 48 subspecies are found on islands of south-east Asia and the south-west Pacific Ocean. The species is Least Concern.

7 Past range and abundance

Endemic to Norfolk I. Presumably occurred throughout the island, but became increasingly confined as habitat was cleared and fragmented. Persisted in Norfolk Island National Park until at least 1968, when two were mist-netted (Smithers and Disney, 1969), and probably 1975, when one was seen (Schodde *et al.*, 1983), but intensive searches by residents and visiting birdwatchers (McKean *et al.*, 1976, Hermes *et al.*, 1986, Bell, 1990) have failed to detect any for over 20 years. Probably became extinct in the 1970s.

8 Ecology

The Grey-headed Blackbird was a confiding forest bird that fed among leaf litter on the ground.

9 Reasons for extinction

Though clearance would have reduced the area of suitable habitat, the subspecies remained common on the island until the 1940s by which time cats had been present for more than a century and European Blackbirds *Turdus merula* (introduced in 1918) and Song Thrushes *T. philomelos* (introduced in 1913; Smithers and Disney, 1969, Schodde *et al.*, 1983) had been established for three decades. Given that the Island Thrush is closely related to the European Blackbird (Schodde and Mason, 1999), hybridisation may have played a part in the subspecies' decline, but the

principal reason for its disappearance was probably the arrival of Black Rats *Rattus rattus* in the 1940s (Robinson, 1988). Genes of the subspecies may persist in the population of European Blackbirds. On Norfolk I., immature European Blackbirds have a lighter head than adults and a substantial proportion of the population is pied. This theory could be tested by DNA analysis (M. Christian, R. Holdaway).

10 Bibliography

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- Comments received from
Margaret Christian, Honey McCoy, Owen Evans, Richard Holdaway.