



## ***Why Save Endangered Subspecies like the Red-tail?***

*by David Baker-Gabb (Chair of the Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo Recovery Team)*

There are sound biological, legal, ethical and social reasons for conserving subspecies such as the Red-tail. Subspecies are genetically distinct regional populations. As such, subspecies are the building blocks of evolution, and the 'real' units of biodiversity in birds. If we are to conserve biodiversity for future generations, then subspecies are the starting point. This scientific concept has been enshrined in Victorian (FFG Act 1988) and Federal (EPBC Act 1999) legislation. This means that various government agencies are legally obliged to work to ensure the conservation of listed subspecies such as the Red-tail.

Why should the rest of us bother about Red-tails? Birds are widely acknowledged as being good environmental indicators. When lots of bird species decline or go regionally extinct, as has happened to Australia's woodland birds in the sheep/wheat belt, then this is a clear indication that the system we live in is out of balance. The main threat to our sustainable future has been over-clearing of native vegetation. Many areas in Australia's sheep/wheat belt have lost 80-95% of their original native vegetation, and much of what is left is degraded. Studies of areas that still retain a reasonably intact bird fauna suggest that about 30% of native vegetation needs to be retained in a district if a balance is to be achieved between production and biodiversity retention.

While it is important to conserve Red-tails in their own right, they have a much bigger role to play. Conspicuous endangered birds fill a special position as environmental 'flagships'. They serve as a focus and community rallying point for a wide range of other species, not least of which are the invertebrates which maintain our soil and water health and comprise over 99% of species on earth.

Conserving wide-ranging endangered birds such as the Red-tail requires the retention of large areas of suitable habitat, and the restoration of other areas which have been degraded. This work assists a huge number of other less notable native species which would receive little or no attention without the presence of the 'flagship' endangered species.

It is no accident that the end result of much of the field research on Red-tails is targeted towards improving land management practices in their habitat such as: protection of large, hollow-bearing dead trees, changes to fire regimes in blocks of stringybarks, enforcement of native vegetation retention controls in buloke woodlands, and working with landholders to protect important areas of habitat from overgrazing.

Ultimately, work on endangered subspecies should be as much about regional biodiversity conservation,

and a sustainable future for humans, as it is about saving one of evolution's building blocks from extinction. Red-tails provide us with one of the best available opportunities to help achieve these fundamental goals in south-western Victoria and south-eastern South Australia.

## ***Farm Planning Field Day***

In 2003, the Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo Recovery Team (via Wendy Beumer) conducted a landholder survey to assess understanding and attitudes toward the conservation of the South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo. Key findings were that:

- Planning advisers and natural resource management facilitators need to be informed of the issues facing the Red-tail.
- Farmers require more personalised assistance to access grants and incentives to undertake conservation works on their properties.
- Most revegetation activities are undertaken to enhance farm productivity through shelterbelts, to combat salinity/erosion and to provide fodder – there is little integration of conservation values in farm planning.
- Farmer's Federation and Landcare groups should be a key point of contact for conservation activities and farm planning programs.

Wendy secured funding through the Threatened Species Network (WWF) and Wynns Coonawarra and Victoria Mack was employed as the Farm Planning Project Officer.

The first Farm Planning Field Day was held in Edenhope on the 7th of October. About 16 landholders and 11 representatives from the Wimmera Catchment Management Authority, Trust for Nature, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Department of Primary Industries, West Wimmera Shire and Birds Australia braved the wet and windy conditions. John Marriott, a farm planning consultant now based in Geelong who worked on the Potter Farm Project led the farm planning discussion. According to John, a well-planned farm with 10-15% coverage of native vegetation, plantations and woodlots is more productive than average farms.

The tour commenced with an inspection of Graeme Ryan's property south of Edenhope where significant tree planting has been undertaken for income and conservation. This work is part of the Kowree Biolink, developed and established by the Kowree Farm Tree Group over the last 3 years. The Kowree Biolink, which aims to link Little Desert National Park with the Glenelg River, was a finalist in this year's National Landcare Awards.

Another highlight was Andrew and Ros Bradey's property north of Edenhope, which clearly demonstrated the benefits of farm planning. Fencing



## ***Farm Planning Field Day cont'd***

is undertaken according to soil type and land use. The protection of remnant vegetation has been enhanced by fencing out natural areas, and concentrating on the more productive areas of the farm. One effective innovation is the use of cheap, portable three strand electric fencing. Revegetation in plantations and woodlots has been strategically placed to maximize shelter and agricultural production, including the use of laneways. Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos are regular visitors to the Bradey farm.

Richard Hill (Project Officer) spoke about the importance of stringybark and buloke as a food source for the RtBC. It came as a surprise to many that it takes about 100 years before a buloke will become a source of seed for Red-tails. Many of the isolated buloke in paddocks are well over 200 years old. This highlighted the importance of protecting what buloke is left, as well as planting new areas to buloke.

Some landholders represented on the day expressed concern at restrictions they may face regarding clearing of paddock trees. Generally this is related to installation of centre-pivot irrigation, but can also be to improve access for machinery such as large spray units, or for other farm developments. Richard Hill said that the recovery team acknowledged these

conflicting pressures. Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos regularly use scattered paddock buloke trees for feeding, and the majority of larger bulokes that the cockatoos prefer occur on private land as paddock trees. Thus paddock buloke trees are important for Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos and the recovery team is trying to get them better protected. On the other hand the recovery team respects the right of farmers to carry out their businesses. The recovery team is strongly promoting the idea of biodiversity trading, where landholders receive payments for maintaining important environmental assets on their properties. Discussions then moved onto the idea of developing whole-farm vegetation management plans, so that native vegetation is managed at a property scale. This would streamline the process for the West Wimmera Shire, and allow a better assessment of the impacts of proposed native vegetation removals, and of the value of proposed offsets and replantings.

The day was a useful learning experience for all involved. Additional field days will be held in the Casterton and Frances districts next year. To register your interest in attending one of these field days please contact Tania Rajic (08) 8724 7615; [mulga@icisp.net.au](mailto:mulga@icisp.net.au).



Edenhope landholder Andrew Bradey (second from left) leading discussion at the site of buloke revegetation he has carried out. Buloke is slow to establish and requires more intensive maintenance in the early years. Buloke in the background has suckered from the larger parent tree since roadside stock grazing ceased over 40-50 years ago. This was part of an October bus tour organised by the Wimmera CMA with representatives from Birds Australia, Trust for Nature, DSE and the CMA's Biodiversity Committee.  
Photo: Dean Robertson.



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## ***Introducing Tania Rajic – Extension Officer***

It's terrific to have been given the opportunity to spread the word about Red Tails. The selection of the Red Tail as the mascot for the next Commonwealth Games provides great opportunities for extension and for rallying community, government and corporate support for on-ground works which have direct benefits for the cockies. Briefly, my training is in Zoology and I followed that with graduate diploma in horticulture. I lived and worked in Mildura for twelve years, initially working on management inventory of mallee reserves and later in managing mallee national parks. I was first introduced to Red Tails while living in Bourke –we were treated to flocks visiting our backyard (different sub-species of course). In Bourke I took on a community education role with the National Parks and Wildlife Service. I moved to Mt Gambier with my family just over 2 years ago. I look forward to meeting many of you next year – field days and annual count aren't very far away. I don't know that I have the finely honed sense of humour to keep the Red Tail jokes flowing. Any contributions from our wittier readers will be considered!

## ***2004 Nesting activity***

This year's breeding season is looking promising, with a lot of activity at known nest sites. Dick Cooper and Richard Hill have spent many evenings since September searching known and likely-looking nesting sites. So far 4 new nests have been located, making a total of nine nests found to date. Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos are spread across the range this year, with recent sightings from Nelson, Douglas, Penola and Naracoorte. Birds will be nesting in all of these areas. The recovery team is very keen to identify new nesting areas, and we would be very interested to hear of any sightings of single cockatoos. At this time of year, a sighting of a single bird will indicate that there is a nest not too far away, and this is the best way of finding new nests. So please, if you do see a single bird, ring the 1800 number and leave the sighting details and your contact details.

This year's good nesting season is in complete contrast to last year, when very few nests were found. We believe that last year was a poor year for stringybark seed, with both species of stringybarks containing only older seed which the cockatoos find harder to eat. Paul Koch's study of cockatoos feeding in stringybarks showed that cockatoos spent 52% of the day feeding when eating young stringybark seed, and 88% of the day when feeding on older stringybark seed. In years when no new stringybark seed was available, Paul suggested that cockatoos would find breeding difficult, and this seems to have

been the case in 2003. In contrast this year there is new seed on both species of stringybarks, and so we anticipate, and seem to be seeing, a good year for Red Tail nesting.

## ***Karak – Official Commonwealth Games Mascot***

Following nomination by a Mornington Peninsula artist, the south-eastern subspecies of the Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo was announced as the official mascot for the 2006 Melbourne Commonwealth Games. "Karak" derives his name from the Red-tail's call. According to the Commonwealth Games marketing team, Karak embodies the spirit of the Games. He is uniquely Australian and welcoming to all. His gregarious nature and rugged good looks make Karak the perfect mascot to unite city and bush.(!) The recovery team is keen to secure benefits for the Red-tails as a result of this profile and is pursuing sponsorship opportunities. More in the next newsletter.



Karak





# RED TAIL News

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## ***RtBC Sightings***

One of the issues to come up at the November Recovery Team Meeting was the need to encourage people in the outer perimeter of the red-tails range to report sightings. Specifically, we are really keen to hear about any birds you have seen in the northern areas, such as in the vicinity of Little Desert National Park and in the southern areas, near Lower Glenelg National Park. All sightings are noted and are an important part of the conservation work for Red-tails.

Please telephone 1800 262 062 or email Tania on [mulga@icisp.net.au](mailto:mulga@icisp.net.au). Please include: date and time, place (CFS/CFA map reference is appreciated), how many birds and your phone number. If you need more bumper stickers for friends or interested observers please give me a call.

## ***2005 Annual Count***

The next annual count is scheduled for 1 May 2005. Please contact Tania if you are interested in registering as a volunteer.

## ***Lucindale Field Day***

18th and 19th of March are the dates for the next Lucindale Field Days. If you are interested in either helping to set up the display or spending an hour or two at the display, please give Tania a call on (08) 8724 7615.



*Best wishes for  
the festive season and a  
positive and successful  
New Year.*

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