



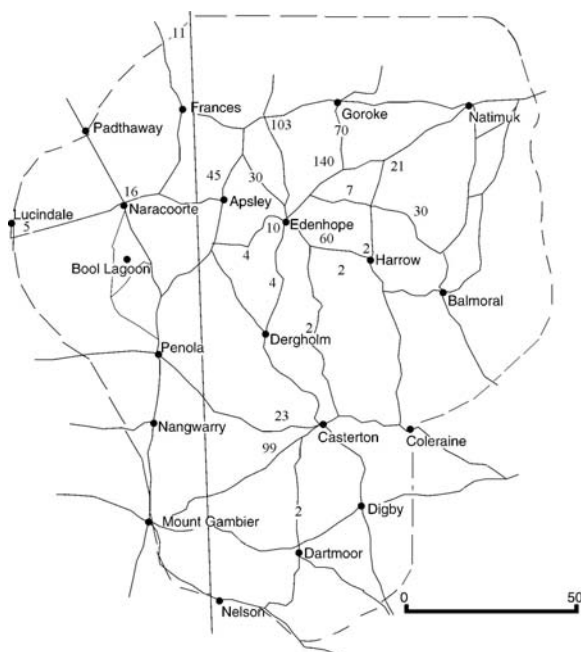
## Annual Count Results

We broke the record! This years annual count was held over the weekend of 26-27 February and the total count was 686 Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos. This is the largest number of red tails ever recorded. Another record broken was the number of people taking part – 84 groups of people.

When we add up the total we have to allow for the possibility of two groups counting the same birds, we tend to err towards the lower number and this means that in some cases the numbers on the map don't relate to the total numbers counted over the weekend. It's because we're conservative in our estimates that we can be fairly confident that on the information given to us, the total of 686 is now considered the new minimum number of birds. In our information pack, printed in 1998, we had estimated a total population of 500-800. Given the coverage that we had over the count weekend and the number of people participating the total number may not be much more than 700. If the annual count continues to grow in participants then we will have to be getting closer to finding the total number.

The map shows that most of the birds found were in the northern range around Edenhope. At this time of year, with the Buloke in season, we often see large numbers in this area. This is not always the case though, in 1998 the Buloke didn't produce a good crop of fruit and no birds were found in the area during the annual count.

Whatever the number is though, it's still not many. To get the Red Tail off the endangered list we would need the population to be in the order of 1500. It is also quite possible that the population is still in decline.



## ABC Landline

The annual count was filmed by the ABC Landline programme and was aired on Sunday 19th March. The ABC team were in the area for 3 days and did a great background to the project and the main threats to the Red Tail.

## The Team

The Red Tail team has grown over the last 6 months. In addition to Richard Hill – Field Biologist and Tim Burnard – Extension Officer, we have 3 students working on specific aspects of Red Tail habitat.

Martine Maron is an honours student from Monash University. Martine spent a lot of this summer chasing around the Buloke patches in the Edenhope area taking samples, observing birds and talking to locals. By June this year we should have a much better understanding of Buloke fruit and how important it is to the Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo.

Briony Jarman and Paul Koch have been living on and off in Casterton for the past year, they're the ones you might see driving around in the Adelaide University cars.

Briony has been keeping an eye on the past breeding season especially the predation of nests. This involved among other tests, the placing of 120 artificial eggs tied to hollows in trees to gauge what extent predation occurs. We should have some outcomes from Briony on completion of her honours in June. Paul is working on his Phd and will be in the area for 3 years. He is doing a detailed study into Brown Stringybark including why the birds preferentially select trees for feeding, and the effects of fire. One outcome from Paul's study might be a new burning regime in State Forests and Parks.

## Destruction of Red Tail Nesting Habitat

You may have seen in the media recently, stories relating to the clearing of dead trees just south of Edenhope. The trees were in a paddock which has been the subject of Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo studies for over 10 years. It had 6 known Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo nests and is one of the most significant Red Tail nesting areas known. Last year we only found 21 nests throughout the whole range.

The West Wimmera Shire has now reached an agreement with Timbercorp, the owners of the cleared land, on a compensation package to try to repair some of the damage caused by this act.



## ***Birds Australia Appeal***

Birds Australia manages the Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo Recovery Team with money mostly received from Environment Australia. Birds Australia is a private organisation with over 5000 members Australia wide and concentrates on saving birds and their habitat for future generations to enjoy and learn from. The organisation is in the process of purchasing the pastoral property 'Newhaven Station' 335 km north-west of Alice Springs in the Northern Territory to protect its many rare birds.

Birds Australia is conducting an appeal to raise the money required to purchase this land for reservation and we have included a pamphlet regarding this, for your consideration.

## ***Research Update***

### ***Nesting Studies***

This year breeding was investigated in both the Casterton area and a new study area north of Naracoorte. A total of 13 nests were found in the Dunrobin study area and a total of 17 were recorded throughout the range in Victoria. In South Australia four nests were found in the Naracoorte study area. In Naracoorte the small number of nests prevented data on breeding success but data on growth rates and maximum nestling weight were collected from all four nests. Of the 15 Victorian nests for which we have data so far, 13 were in dead trees, 11 of these in dead Red Gum on private grazing land; two were in dead Brown Stringybark trees in publicly-owned woodland. Two were in live trees, one Red Gum and one Yellow/Blue Gum *E. leucoxydon*. Of the four South Australian nests found this year all were in live scattered trees on grazed farmland, three Brown Stringybarks and one Yellow/Blue Gum.

Breeding success for nests in the Casterton area this year is similar to that recorded last year with 4 out of 13 nests successfully fledging young. This is despite the experimental collaring of half of the nest trees to exclude predators. Collaring did increase the survival rate of eggs markedly, but not of chicks. These results do show that ground predators, probably Brush-tail Possums, are significant predators of Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo eggs in the Casterton area.

Of four nests followed in the Naracoorte study area three have fledged so far. All of these nests were collared and so breeding success data is not comparable with the Casterton area. The four new nests found in South Australia make a total of ten nests for which we have some data. Of these seven were in live trees and three in dead trees, quite different to the overall picture of nest tree choice where approximately 80% of nests are recorded in dead trees. Four of the ten were Brown Stringybark, four Blue Gum (*E. leucoxydon*), one Red Gum and a probable Hill Gum *E. fasciculosa* (dead tree). These results highlight the importance of live scattered trees in Naracoorte and more generally for nesting Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos.

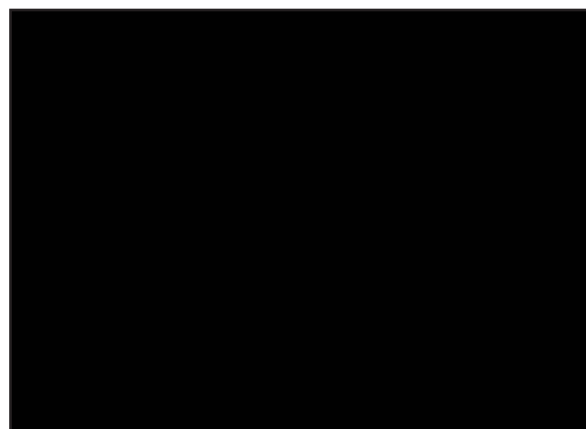
## ***Radio-tracking***

Five Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos were captured in the Naracoorte study area in November and fitted with tail-mounted radio-transmitters. These birds were relocated twice-weekly until all transmitters had fallen off in mid-January.

During that time one marked bird moved 45 km away from the point of capture into Victoria at the Little Desert National Park. These data are yet to be fully analysed but preliminary results include: 90% of radio-locations of tagged birds were on private land (n=54); 64% of radio-locations were of birds were using trees which were scattered as opposed to being part of a bush remnant; 55% of sites where radio-tagged birds were located were grazed by domestic stock.

These preliminary results demonstrate the importance of scattered Brown Stringybark trees in paddocks for foraging, as well as Brown Stringybark trees in blocks of native vegetation. Permits to remove scattered Brown Stringybark trees are routinely issued in the lower-south east of South Australia and these trees are also declining through poor health and lack of regeneration. We will be taking these results to the Native Vegetation Council in June to stress the importance of scattered Brown Stringybarks, as both feeding and nesting trees.

Many thanks to volunteers Anne Craig, Trevor and Marcia Brown, Dee Miller, Phillip Wardle, Evan Roberts, Tim Collins, Drew Laslett, and Keith and Helen Hampton, who provided great assistance in relocating radio-tagged birds.



*A group of Red Tail observers at the Annual Count Field Day, February 2000*