



Calyptorhynchus banksii graptogyne

Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo



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Welcome

There are 5 subspecies of Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo in Australia. The South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus banksii graptogyne*) is only found in south-east South Australia and south-west Victoria. With an estimated population of about 1000 birds, the South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo is in danger of extinction.

This website relates specifically to the South-eastern subspecies.

In this website you can;

Find out about efforts to save this beautiful but endangered bird.

Look at pictures of the bird, get general information on where it lives and what it feeds on, and view Red-tail Newsletters.

You can record your own sightings of Red-tails and find out about the various activities that you can become involved in to help secure a healthy future for this magnificent bird.

GENERAL

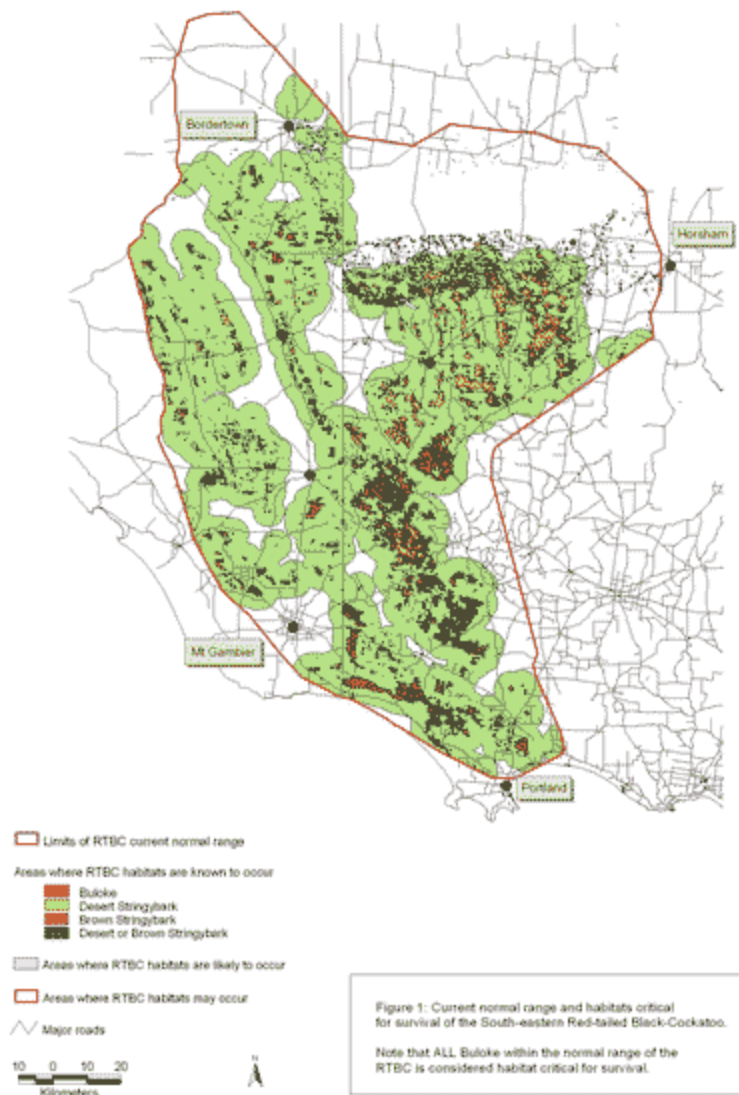
Appearance



Male Red-tails have glossy black plumage with stunning, bright red tail panels. Females are quite different but equally spectacular – they are one of the most brightly marked subspecies of Red-Tail. They have duller brown-black plumage but the feathers of their head, neck and parts of their wing are speckled with yellow. Viewed from below, their body is barred in pale orange-yellow. Their tail barring can be almost all pale yellow or pale yellow grading to pale orange-yellow at the tip. Females have an off-white bill which one volunteer suggests looks like the birds are carrying golf balls! Males have a grey bill. Juveniles are difficult to distinguish from adult females from the age of 1 to 3 years.

Seasonal Behaviour

Through Spring and early summer, the breeding season, Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos are generally seen alone or as family parties of 2 to 3 birds. During autumn and winter it is more common to see the birds



in larger flocks. Several flocks of 100 birds and a single flock of 245 birds were seen during the 2005 annual count.

Feeding

Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos are specialist feeders, relying almost entirely on the seeds of Brown and Desert stringybark (*Eucalyptus baxteri* and *E. arenacea*) and Buloke trees (*Allocasuarina leuhmannii*). Clearing of these feed trees is considered to be the main threat to long-term survival of Red-tails. Unlike Yellow-tails which happily feed on seed from introduced plantation pines, Red-tails haven't found an alternative food source.

Management of remnant bushland also impacts on seed production. Too frequent burning of stringybark forest has been shown to contribute to reduced seed crops (Koch 2004). Stock grazing, particularly by cattle, results in ringbarking. This is mainly due to cattle rubbing up against the trunk. Eventually this leads to the tree dying.



Ringbarked Stringybark

Dr Paul Koch, a biologist researching factors influencing food availability found that some food shortages are natural and due to Desert Stringybark fruiting on a three year cycle and Brown Stringybark on a 2-4 year cycle. Red-tails will feed on the species that has fruited most recently, preferring the softer seed capsule. Stringybark will retain the seed in the capsule on the tree, however as it matures, it hardens and requires more time and effort to extract the seed. This is critical for a nesting pair as it means the nest may be left for unusually long periods of time, resulting in nest failure.

Effects of Fire on Food The amount of seed produced by stringybark trees is substantially reduced for up to 10 years following a fuel reduction burn or wildfire. In order to maximise the amount of seed available for Red-tails the Department of Sustainability and Environment will limit fuel reduction burning in stingybark forest within the range of the Red-tail. DSE is also investigating low intensity fuel reduction burning techniques to reduce the impact on stringybark seed production. Timing fuel reduction burns to avoid years in which stringybark forests are carrying heavy crops of newly matured seed capsules will also help to minimize the impact of fire on Red-tail feed trees.



Remnant buloke is mostly restricted to roadside remnants or scattered paddock trees

Buloke occurs on heavier, more fertile soils favoured for agriculture. Only about 2% of buloke remains across the Red-tails range. The birds move to Buloke areas in late summer and autumn to feed on the seeds. Unlike stringybark, buloke does not retain the seed in the capsule.



Stringybark woodland



Red-tails leave a tell-tale litter of twigs and chewed capsules (\"chewings\") beneath their feed trees



Scattered paddock trees (Research undertaken by Department of Sustainability and Environment predicts that based on current rates of clearing no paddock buloke will remain by 2040.)



Areas where centre pivots are being installed recorded loss of scattered buloke as high as 39% over a 15 year period from 1982 to 1997.



Fuel reduction burn

Nesting

As with many other parrots and cockatoos, Red-tails nest in deep hollows that have formed in very large, old eucalypts. Most nest sites are found in Red Gums (*E.camaldulensis*) but Red-tails will also nest in stringybark (*E.baxteri* and *E.arenacea*), Manna Gums (*E. viminalis*) and Yellow Gums (*E.leucoxylon*). Some of these trees are more than 200 years old.

Many nest sites are in farming paddocks in dead trees, ringbarked over 100 years ago to improve pasture. Legislative changes have been introduced across the Red-tail range to protect these trees. Hollow trees benefit lots of birds, mammals and insects that are beneficial to farmers because they eat agricultural pests. Where possible it is of great benefit to retain them. If landholders wish to remove dead, hollow trees advice should be sought from a local Department of Sustainability and Environment Office in Victoria or Department of Environment and Heritage in South Australia. Refer to the [Contacts](#) page.

Protecting trees with hollows, encouraging natural regeneration and planting for the future will help to ensure that Red-tails have access to suitable nest trees both now and in the future.



Nest trees are collared with galvanised iron to prevent Brush-tailed Possums taking eggs or chicks from the nest.



Signage to promote legislative change

During the breeding season (spring and early summer), Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos are generally seen alone or as family parties of 2 or 3 birds. Red-tail chicks take a relatively long time to fledge – it's almost 3 months from when they hatch to when they can leave the nest.

This places extra pressure on the parents as they are restricted to sourcing food from areas within a few kilometers from the nest. A major cause of nest failure in years when seed availability is low has been attributed to females leaving the nest to supplement the food brought to them by their mates (Jarmyn 2000).



South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos incubate a single egg



A chick at about 1 week of age



A chick at 5 weeks



Juvenile males closely resemble adult females in plumage characteristics until they are about 3 years old.
(Female bird to the right)

The Recovery Team

The Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo Recovery Team is a non-constitutional body of representatives of various interests. Whilst membership of the team is dynamic, it currently has representatives from;

- Birds Australia
- South Australian Farmer's Federation
- Department of Sustainability and Environment
- Department of Environment and Heritage (Federal)
- Department for Environment and Heritage (South Australia)
- Glenelg Hopkins and Wimmera Catchment Management Authorities
- South East Natural Resource Consultative Committee
- Local Government
- Adelaide University
- Forestry SA.



RtBC Recovery Team meeting in Casterton in July 2005

The Recovery Program is funded through the Natural Heritage Trust and also receives sponsorship from Wynns Coonawarra Wines. Currently there are several people working 'on the ground', they are Richard Hill - field biologist, Tania Rajic - extension officer, and Martine Maron- who recently completed a PhD specialising in Buloke. This study into Red-tails has been running since November 1997, however there have been two other considerable efforts prior to this one. The Recovery Team actions are tightly defined in a Recovery Plan. The plan sets out the objectives, strategies and actions necessary for the Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo recovery.

To request a copy of the plan contact the; Department of the Environment and Heritage, Threatened Species and Threat Abatement Section, at GPO Box 787 CANBERRA ACT 2601,

Email: recoveryplans@deh.gov.au ,

phone (02) 6274 2405,



Richard Hill - Field Biologist (left)

Monitoring of Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos

Each year members of the recovery team and volunteers collect a range of information which assist us to assess how Red Tail populations are performing. This includes the annual count in which we count the entire range in one day, reporting sightings of Red Tails all year round, and measuring the growth and survival rates of chicks to measure nesting success. Now detailed 'flock counts' are used as the main measure of nesting success, the number of young birds which have been produced each year.



Flock counts are done in autumn each year. Because young Red Tails are indistinguishable in the field from two and three-year old birds and from females of any age, we count the number of adult males in each flock. Adult males are recognisable by their uniform black colour and red tail feathers. All other Red Tails are spotted and barred, with barred tail feathers. The proportion of adult males in flocks in autumn varies from year to year, according to how many young birds have been produced in the preceding breeding season. More successful nesting means more young birds, thus a lower proportion of adult males. Flock counts have shown us that the breeding seasons of 2004-05 and 1998-1999 produced far more young birds than any intervening years. In those two years flocks contained an average of 37% adult males in autumn.



Photo; Wayne Bigg, Mt Gambier



Photo; Rob Drummon, Hamilton

Annual Counts

Every year, a group of over 100 enthusiastic volunteers spend one day driving through thousands of kilometres of stringybark forest.

2006 Annual Count Report

Thanks to a great team of 155 volunteers, new and old, 1078 Red-tailed Black-Cockies were counted this year. Coordinated by Birds Australia, the count was conducted on April 29th across the birds range, south-east South Australia and south-west Victoria. Volunteers travelled from as far away as Mildura, Melbourne, Adelaide and Langhorne Creek. 2,500km of stringybark tracks were traversed on the day - no mean feat considering the cost of fuel.

316 Red-tails were recorded in South Australia. 762 were spotted in Victoria. Some large flocks were counted this year including 110 at Wandilo Native Forest Reserve, 58 at Lucindale and 50 near Struan. A flock of 221 Red-tails was just over the SA/Vic border on the Victorian side - in Lower Glenelg National Park. Other flocks in Victoria included 86 at Rennick State Forest and 214 at Chetwynd.

This is an encouraging result, an increase on last years figure of 952 birds. Congratulations and thanks to the many landholders and others that volunteered all or part of their Saturday to participate in the count.



2007 annual count report

The results are out from the Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo Annual Count, and there's a surprising drop in the numbers counted. But that is not to say that the birds have actually suffered a population dive since last years count.

This years tally was a mere 675 Red Tails throughout the range, compared to last years record number of 1078. But extension officer to the Red Tail Recovery Team, Tim Burnard, explained "No matter which number, it's still very low and qualifies the bird to be legally classified as 'endangered' and while it's disappointing that we didn't count many Red Tails this year, it doesn't mean that the actual number of birds has dropped. It's more likely that we just missed the birds in the scrub".

And missing the birds is easily done when they roam from the Lower Glenelg National Park up to Keith and from Lucindale to Balmoral. It's possible to trim down the search area when you know that the Red Tails only eat from stringybark trees and Buloke trees and that at this time of year, all of the birds are in stringybark country (Buloke seed is only available during February – March).

The aim is to cover the entire stringybark area and the job was made easier this year with a record number of volunteers taking part in the count, about 190 in total. Volunteers travelled from Adelaide and Melbourne, but the majority of those involved were from within region. Many of the volunteers are local landholders who survey their own properties; others are supplied with a map and instructions on how best to spot Red Tails. It's a great family outing and adds to knowledge about the bird and its needs.

It's unlikely that we will ever be able to count every Red Tail in our range but the Annual Count gives more than an indication of population size. By taking this snapshot across the range of the bird, we get a better understanding of the preferred habitat and use this information in helping to target future conservation works.

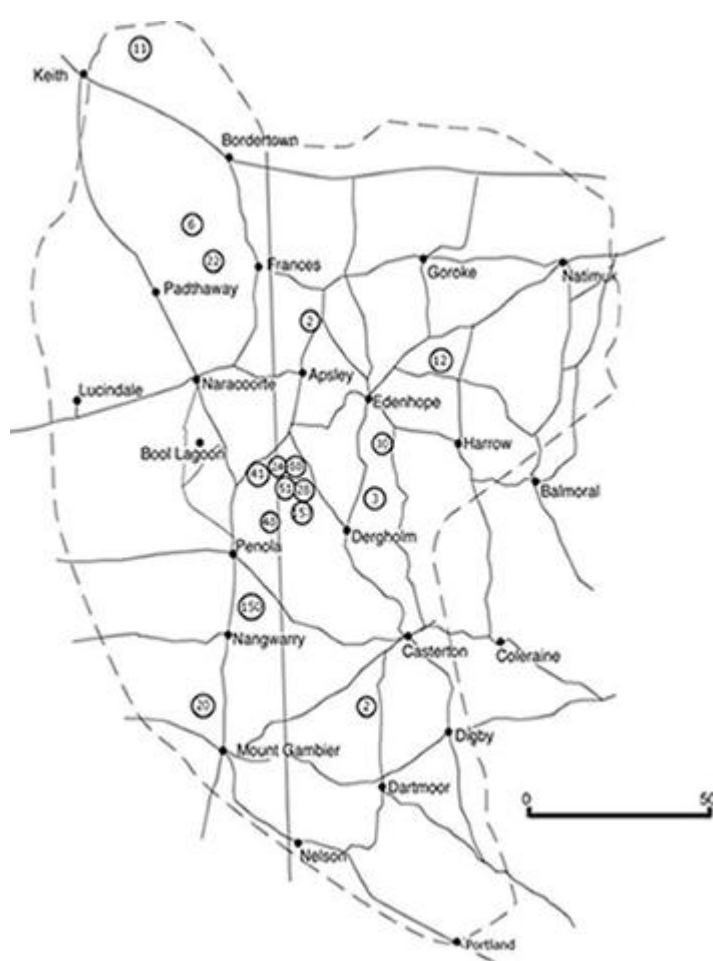
The big winner region in this years count was along the SA/Vic border near Penola and Nangwarry. Locals, Max Arney and Jim Childs saw the most birds. Max spotted 299 birds including 157 in one flock, and Jim saw a mob of 150. Both men have a long interest in the birds and like many other participants, have been involved in the count for most of the past 11 years.

On May 1 2005, 119 volunteers covered over 2000 km in stringybark to find 952 Red-tails. Volunteers cover 59 individual sites across the Red-tail range, noting where and when the birds were seen and what they were doing. Following the annual count, the data is checked to ensure that the same birds aren't being recorded at more than one site. Annual count results this year are the highest recorded to date. Results from flock counts which give us an idea of the level of new recruitment into the population are promising and suggest that the 2004/05 breeding season may have seen good recruitment of juvenile birds into the population. If you would like to find out more about the annual count or register interest in participating in 2006, please email: rtbc@birdsaustralia.com.au or telephone 1800 262 062

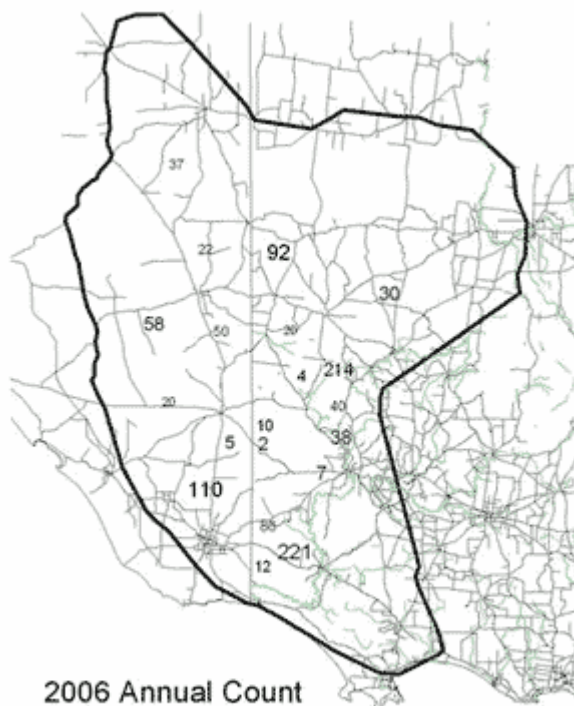


Karak counting with volunteers on May 1

Year	Season	Total
1996	Summer	436
1997	Summer	300
1998	Summer	385
1998	Winter	632
2000	Summer	452
2001	Summer	686
2002	Autumn	679
2003	Autumn	785
2004	Autumn	726
2005	Autumn	952
2006	Autumn	1078

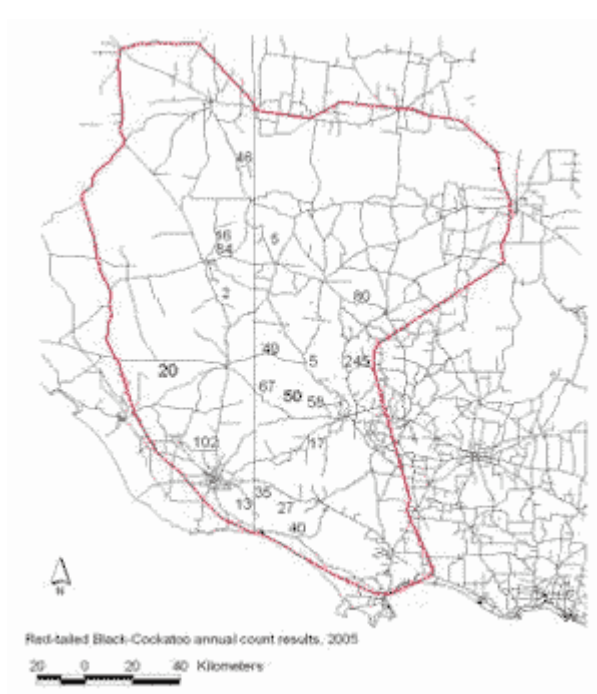


2007 Count

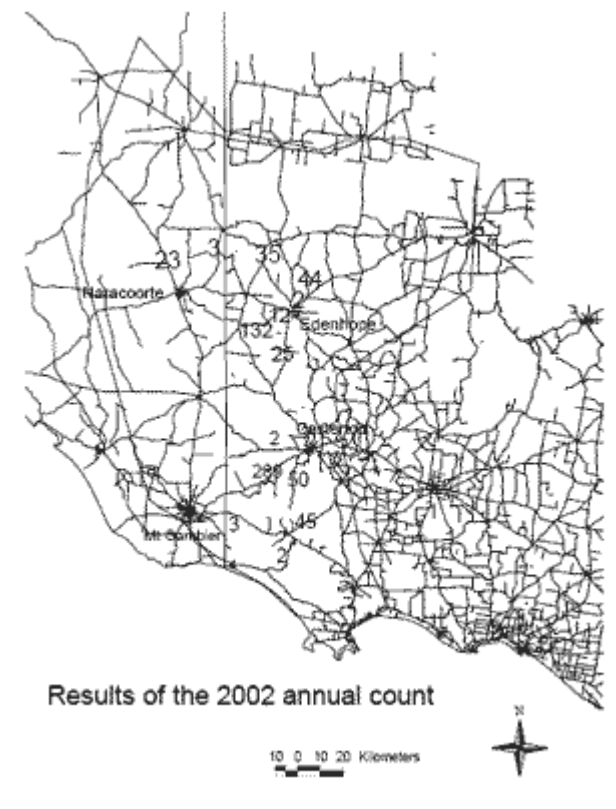


2006 Annual Count

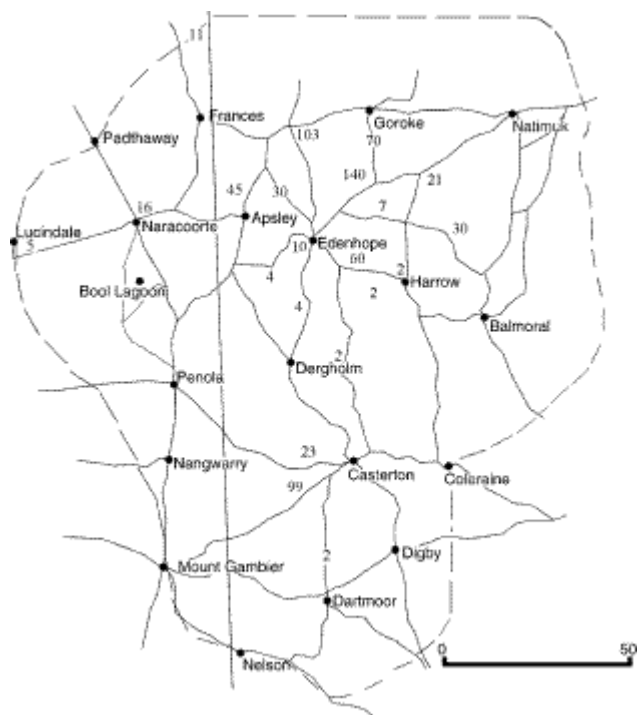
2006 Count



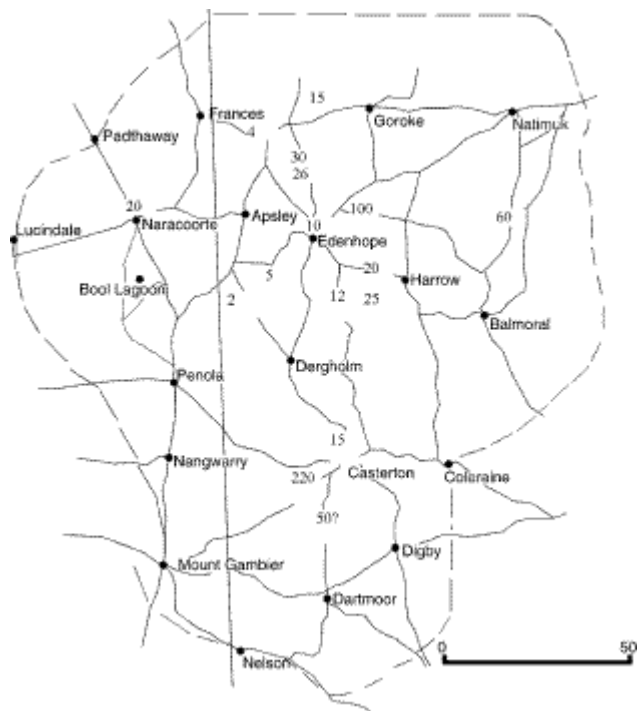
2005 Count



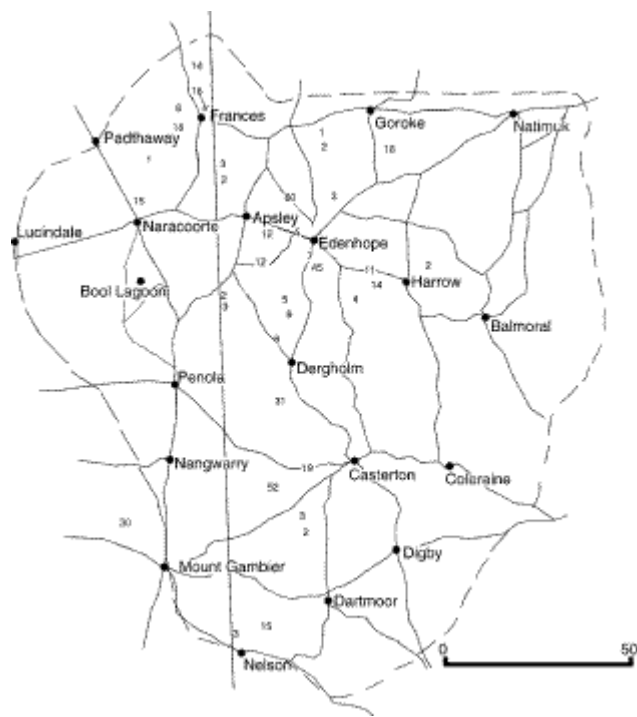
2002 Count



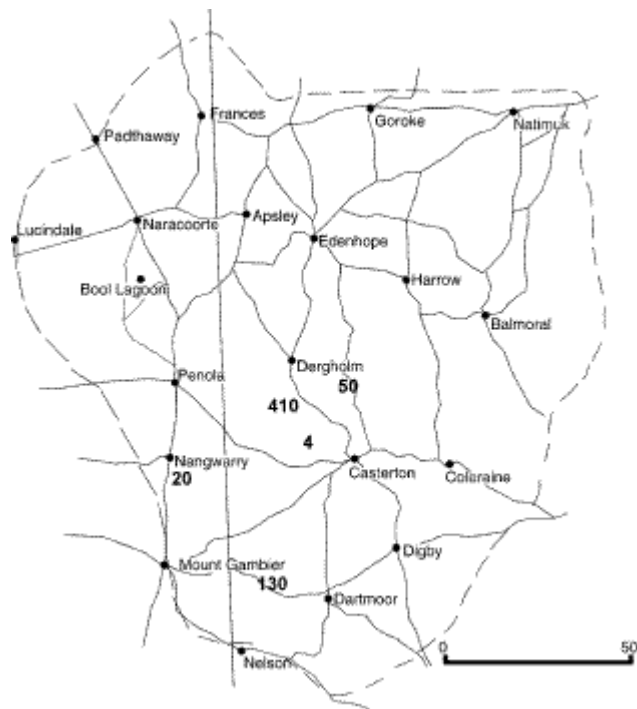
Summer 2000



Winter 1999



Count 1999



1998 Count

Sightings

The recovery team is constantly looking out for sightings of Red-tails. This helps us get a better understanding of the birds' patterns of movement, which will lead to an improved knowledge of their needs. When we get sightings we record these with the 'Victorian Atlas' which documents Red-tail sightings of all birds throughout Victoria and the bird's SA range.

Things to record:

Date / Time of day

How many Red-tails

An accurate location (CFS and CFA fire map book references are ideal however a record with accurate reference to roads, tracks or significant landmarks are fine)

What the birds were doing (feeding, flying, drinking etc.)

*Our study only involves the South-eastern subspecies of the Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo. Please only record sightings of birds seen in south-west Victoria and south-east South Australia.



Photo; Wayne Bigg, Mt Gambier

Contact Details

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Tel: 08 8204 1910;
Website: www.deh.sa.gov.au
- Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria:
240-250 Victoria Pde, East Melbourne 3002.

Tel: 13 6186.

Website: www.dse.vic.gov.au

- Department of the Environment and Heritage (Comm)
Tel: 1800 803 772,
Website: www.deh.gov.au
For more information about the National Heritage Trust www.nht.gov.au/index.html
- Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Unit:
15/71 Constitution Ave Campbell, ACT 2612,
Tel: (02) 6257 4010,
Website: www.wwf.org.au/epbc,
[Email:](#)
- Glossy Black-Cockatoo Recovery Team (Kangaroo Island):
Website: <http://homepages.picknowl.com.au/kic/glossy/gbc.html>
- Threatened Bird Network:
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