

Red-tail NEWS

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Nest maintenance

Homemaintenance reached new heights in April when the Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo Recovery Team did a repair run on artificial and supplementary nesting hollows. The nesting hollows were erected in 1993 in the early stages of the recovery program by the Department of Sustainability and Environment. At this time it was thought that nest hollow availability was limiting the Red-tail population.

35 nest boxes were checked and repaired. 24 were supplementary nest hollows which are basically large, hollow Red Gum logs that have either been strapped onto dead trees or timber poles. Most of these showed some signs of use including duck eggs and signs of chewing and habitation. Red-tail feathers were found in one hollow and signs of use by a Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo in another. PVC hollows which are regularly used by Glossy Black-Cockatoos on Kangaroo Island didn't seem as popular with Red-Tails but their openings were increased in size and they were topped up with Red Gum woodchips which may make them more appealing to birds in the 2008 breeding season. Many thanks to Mt Gambier Bio Gro for donating Red Gum woodchips.

Overall, low usage of these nest hollows seems to support the recovery team view that it is availability of food rather than a shortage of nesting hollows that is currently limiting the Red-tail population. Monitoring of these

artificial hollows next Spring will help corroborate this. Stay tuned as we may be looking for volunteers from the Binnun-Kybybolite area to observe nesting hollows.



Richard Hill elevates the art of nest box maintenance.

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Lucindale Field Days

The Recovery Team participated in the Lucindale Field Days in March once again joining the Primary Industries and Shared Services tent. Despite intensely hot and unpleasant weather the display was well-attended. Landholders were interested in finding out more about Red-tail habitat needs and sharing information about where they had seen the birds and other critters of interest. A big thank you to Evan Roberts who helped out on

both days and introduced me to many landholders. The Connies, a performance troupe born of the 112 year Melbourne Tram Conducting tradition graced our display during Friday and added a new element to the tent which hosted many natural resource management displays. Dressed in uniforms circa 1970 they produced tickets (animal swap cards) one which featured the South-eastern Red-tailed Black-cockatoo from their authentic leather conductor's bags.



The Connies, featuring their animal swap cards.

Conservation Support from the USA

Early this year the recovery program received a cheque for \$225 from the Parrots of the Hills Bird Club, Fountain Hills, Arizona. In 2007 Colac resident Graeme Hyde gave the club a colour presentation on Australian birds. Enthused by the colour slides and club president Lori Bell, the club raised \$US200 from a raffle for the South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo recovery Program. The funds were forwarded to Nature Foundation South Australia (NFSA) which is currently running a fundraiser for the south-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo. Funds raised by NFSA will help with the protection and restoration of Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo habitat. Thanks to Graeme Hyde for promoting the plight of the Red-Tail so widely and to Lori Bell's group for their contribution.



Large numbers of birds were counted drinking at farm troughs on count day.
Photographer Charlotte Davis; Casterton

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2008 annual count

Results from the Saturday May 3rd Annual Count of the South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo are the best recorded since counting commenced in 1996. 73 volunteer groups comprising 160 people from across South Australia and Victoria set off on the day. In total, they travelled along 2600km of tracks through stringybark forest. The final tally for 2008 is 1404 birds. The annual count assists the recovery team with monitoring of the size and distribution of the population. This year, 62% or 869 birds were seen in a relatively small area south-west of Casterton feeding in Desert Stringybark (*Eucalyptus arenacea*) which is carrying a new seed crop.

Population estimates based on the count vary from year to year. While the previous best figure was 1078 birds (2006) only 801 birds were recorded in 2007. This is not attributed to a sudden decline in the population. Weather conditions can influence the success of the count as very wet or windy conditions make it difficult to hear and locate birds. Perfect weather certainly contributed to the success of the 2008 count. In addition lots of pre-count volunteer input from long time Casterton volunteer, Dick Cooper assisted Richard Hill to successfully place volunteers at 7 drinking sites around Casterton where they counted flocks ranging in size from 233 birds to 32. Continuing dry weather has made the birds dependent on artificial waters with most of the Casterton birds counted as they were coming in to stock troughs to drink on dusk.

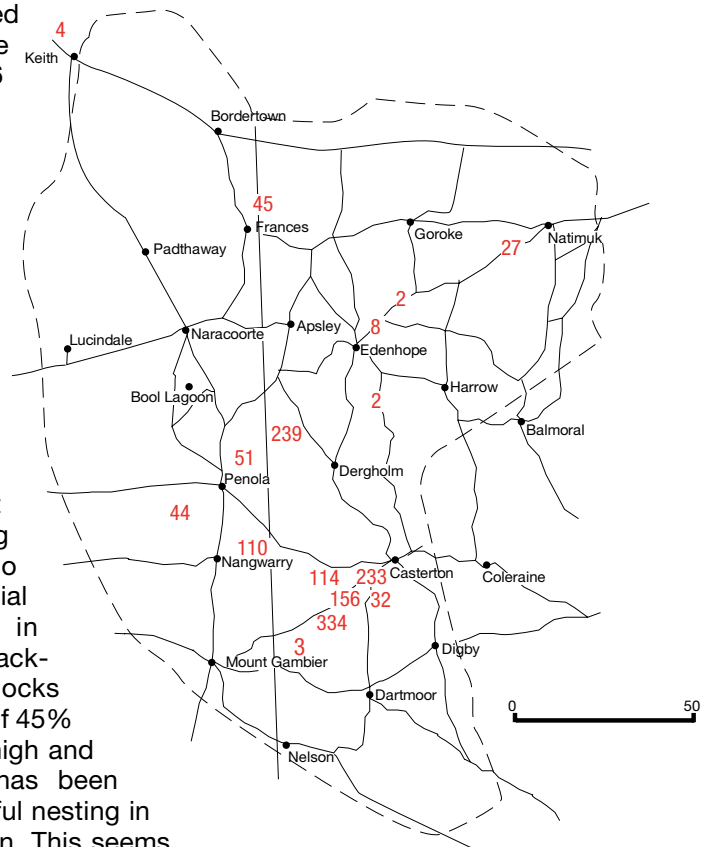
Other large flocks recorded included 110 birds counted in Penola Forest Reserve near Nangwarry in South Australia and 239 birds counted near the South Australian border just west of Coonawarra. Congratulations to Max Arney of Penola who took out the coveted Annual Counting of the Year award for this sighting!

Over 30 people travelled to Bailey's Rocks at the end of the day with 26 camping overnight.

It was a popular weekend - we shared the campground with 40 scouts, an orienteering group and a bagpipe dawn chorus!

Following the count Richard once again carried out a flock count analysis as a measure of recruitment in the previous breeding season. There was no indication of substantial successful nesting in flocks of Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos this year. Flocks contained an average of 45% adult males, which is high and indicates that there has been relatively little successful nesting in the past nesting season. This seems surprising given that the birds had access to a new seed crop in *E. arenacea*. However we did see a similar result in the only other year when birds had access to new *E. arenacea* but not simultaneously to a new crop of *E. baxteri* (2002). The percentage of

males in flocks in that year was slightly lower (43%) than in 2008, suggesting that nesting success was poorer in 2007 than 2002. Thanks to our great team of volunteers for your outstanding efforts on the day.



Some of the annual count volunteers that converged at Bailey's Rocks on Saturday night

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Australian Government



Birds Australia

Peter Menkhorst retires

After 31 years of working on wildlife with Victoria's Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) and its several former incarnations, Red-tail recovery team member Peter Menkhorst has decided to retire and devote his considerable skills and energy to writing and other related pursuits. Many will know Peter as the author of A Field Guide to the Mammals of Australia, but Peter has also published many scientific papers and reports on wildlife. Peter has worked extensively on threatened species, and has chaired for over a decade such recovery teams as those working to conserve Helmeted Honeyeaters, Orange-bellied Parrots and Regent Honeyeaters.

Peter Menkhorst knows more about the status and distribution of Victorian wildlife than just about anyone alive, and his day-to-day presence in the

department will be greatly missed by DSE colleagues and those who work in related fields. However, he has not disappeared entirely from the wildlife scene and will no doubt continue to contribute to the conservation of the nation's wildlife. We on the Red-tail recovery team thank Peter for his considerable contributions and wish him well in his new ventures.

David Baker-Gabb
Convenor – RtBC Recovery Tea



Peter Menkhorst

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