

Red-tail News

Issue 55 November 2022



Photo credit: Chris Farrell.

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WELCOME TO EDITION 55 OF RED-TAIL NEWS.

Welcome back to Red-tail News, the second and final edition of 2022. Can you believe this year is coming to an end already? And what a year it has been! Recovery Team members and Red-tail supporters have accomplished so much since our last update, this edition barely encompasses it all.

Firstly, I would like to say a special thank you to a couple of Red-tail advocates for going the extra mile and making a donation to the project. Your funds have contributed to our ability to make this edition of the newsletter even better, thank you very much from the Recovery Team. Secondly, I would like to say thanks to everyone who took the time to write a story for this newsletter. Your articles ensure a captivating read, helping to spread the word about the species and our work. And thirdly, a continuous thank you to the landholders in the region who play an important part in nest box monitoring. Allowing us to monitor nest boxes on your property each summer is contributing to our long term knowledge and understanding of what SeRtBC's (South-eastern Red-tailed Black Cockatoo) need to successfully breed.

In this edition, we will hear about the results from the 2022 Annual Count and Flock Counts. Ben Zeeman from Glenelg Hopkins CMA fills us in on a pine management project which is restoring stringybark feeding habitat. Bron Perryman gives us an update on what she has been doing with schools in the region and the thousands of trees that have gone in the ground this planting season. The Kowree Tree Farm Group explains how the wonderful humans from BlazeAid helped out after the Poolajelo bushfire and we also learn about a beautiful Red-tail inspired artwork piece in the Edenhope Library.

On behalf of the Recovery Team, I would like to wish everyone a safe and happy summer, and I hope you enjoy reading this exciting edition of Red-tail News.

Thanks, Skye

And also just a small reminder, if you would like to receive the electronic version of Red-tail News instead of the postal version, let me know. Send me a quick email to redtail@birdlife.org.au.

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AUSTRALIA

HUNTING FOR 2022/23 NESTS

BirdLife Australia and the South-eastern Red-tailed Black Cockatoo Recovery Team are again calling on landholders and members of the public to help locate new nests of the endangered cockatoo.

Since 2011, nest incentive payments have been offered to the public for information on new nest sites of the cockatoo across its range in the south east of South Australia and south west of Victoria.

More than forty new nests have been discovered through the incentive scheme, with the Recovery Team keen to find more nests during the breeding season, which runs from September 2022 to March 2023. It is important to find nests, so they can be protected from predators such as brush-tail possums, and to better understand what the birds need to raise their chicks successfully.

Payments of \$500 will be offered for information which leads to the discovery of new nests.

Red-tails nest in large hollows (15-50cm), which most often occur in very old, large eucalypts such as red gums in paddocks. Nest hollows can be in dead or live trees, with most nests occurring within 3km of stringybark forest.

Unlike other species of black cockatoos, it's uncommon for Red-tails to return to the same nest year after year. Nest selection depends on the availability of food (stringybark seeds) within close proximity to nest sites. This makes finding active nests always challenging.

It will be great to find new nests this breeding season. Spotting single adult males or pairs of Red-tails flying into a water source or large trees could be indicators of nesting birds. Monitoring their nests is more important than ever as we believe many years of poor breeding to be one of the main causes of population decline.

We understand that some landholders are hesitant about reporting Red-tails on their property but the Recovery Team would like to reassure the community that there are no negative impacts associated with reporting a nest to the Recovery Team. We only want to monitor each nest from a distance and place a protective cover around the base of the tree, which will protect the nest without impacting the tree.

For anyone that spots some Red-tails, please report them by calling 1800 262 062 or by email at redtail@birdlife.org.au. All we need is the date and time of sighting, the number of Red-tails, a location (a grid reference or GPS coordinates would be great), and what the birds were doing (ie feeding, flying, drinking etc) when you saw them.

Guidelines for the nest incentive scheme and information on Red-tail nesting behaviour are available on our website www.redtail.com.au.

This project is supported by the Limestone Coast Landscape Board, Wimmera Catchment Management Authority and Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority, through funding from the Australian Government.



Confirming a new nest can mean a few hours of sitting and watching...
Photo credit: Bob Green

2022 ANNUAL COUNT RESULTS

This year, on Saturday 7 May, we had an impressive 70 groups comprising of 118 volunteers searching for Red-tails in stringybark forests across its range. Volunteers travelled far and wide within the range of the cockatoo in south-east South Australia and south-west Victoria.

After taking into consideration likely duplicate records and a few additional sightings of Red-tails recorded either side of count day the final tally stands at 1,143 birds, very close to the 2021 tally of 1,230 birds.

Volunteers reported 25 sightings this year. The weather conditions may have played a part in seeing fewer birds on the day as it was a pretty wet and cold day. Five large flocks ranging in size from 70-250 birds were included within the total and were found around Edenhope, Coonawarra and Rennick. Other sightings were made near Benayeo, Charam, Langkoop, Dergholm, Penola, Francis and Wandilo. The birds were again widely dispersed across the range, with sightings from as far north as Goroke in the West Wimmera and as far south as Rennick, SE of Mount Gambier.

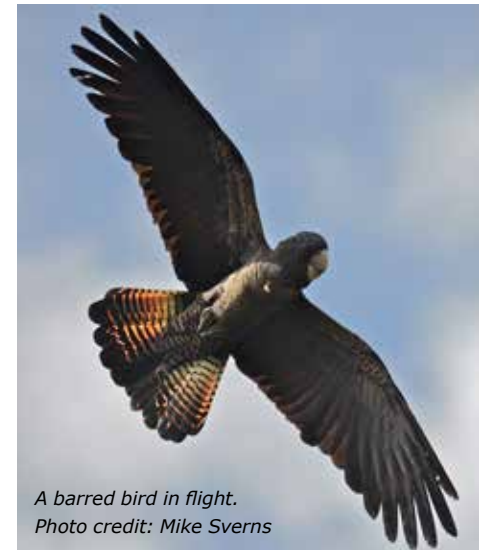
Again volunteers were encouraged to collect information about stringybark seed in the areas they visited. There were 15 volunteer groups that opted to take part in this monitoring, which meant we were able to collect valuable data on the amount of food currently available for Red-tails.

Information gathered during the annual count is vital to determine patterns of habitat use, the minimum number of birds in the population and the location of large flocks. Flock counts are carried out in the weeks following the annual count to gain an indication of breeding success from the previous few years.

This year volunteer teams spent over 210 hours searching for Red-tails, covering more than 2,130 kilometres of roadside stringybark forest. There was also a great turnout at the training session in Casterton, including those who had never participated in the count before. It was great to see some new faces in amongst our wonderful regulars. The count would not be able to take place without the assistance of our fantastic volunteers.

BirdLife Australia and the Recovery Team would like to thank all the

wonderful volunteers involved, many of whom travelled long distances to participate. A special thanks to Evan Roberts for his assistance with promoting the count and getting local landholders involved on the day. Also thanks to Bron Perryman, Richard Hill and Tim Burnard for their invaluable annual count knowledge!



WHAT IS A FLOCK COUNT AND THE 2022 REPORT

Flock counts are conducted in autumn each year to measure the breeding success of previous seasons. Because young SeRtBC are effectively indistinguishable in the field from one, 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. These are collectively called 'barred birds'. The proportion of adult males and barred birds in flocks in autumn varies from year to year. We attribute that variation to the amount of young birds produced in the preceding four breeding seasons. More successful recruitment means more young birds, thus a lower proportion of adult males and a higher proportion of barred birds.

Counts are done from drinking sites, when individual birds become much more visible as they fly down or up from a drinking site. RTBCs may drink several times per day but are creatures of habit and always drink last thing before flying to their night time roost. This is when Recovery Team members perform the flock counts.

This year we were able to collect counts from six flocks totalling 535 birds. The average proportion of

barred birds was greater than any values observed since 2014. Assuming that the survival of birds greater than one year old is constant from year to year, then this year's marked increase in barred birds is likely the result of a particularly successful breeding season in 2021/22. Our best understanding is that this observed higher proportion of barred birds can be explained by continuing levels of relatively higher

food availability in stringybarks, despite the greater than two-year-old age of the desert stringybark seed crop. This year's data does, nonetheless, continue the overall trend of declining proportion of barred birds in flocks evident in this data for more than 10 years.

Richard Hill (DELWP, Victoria) and Skye McPherson (Birdlife Australia)

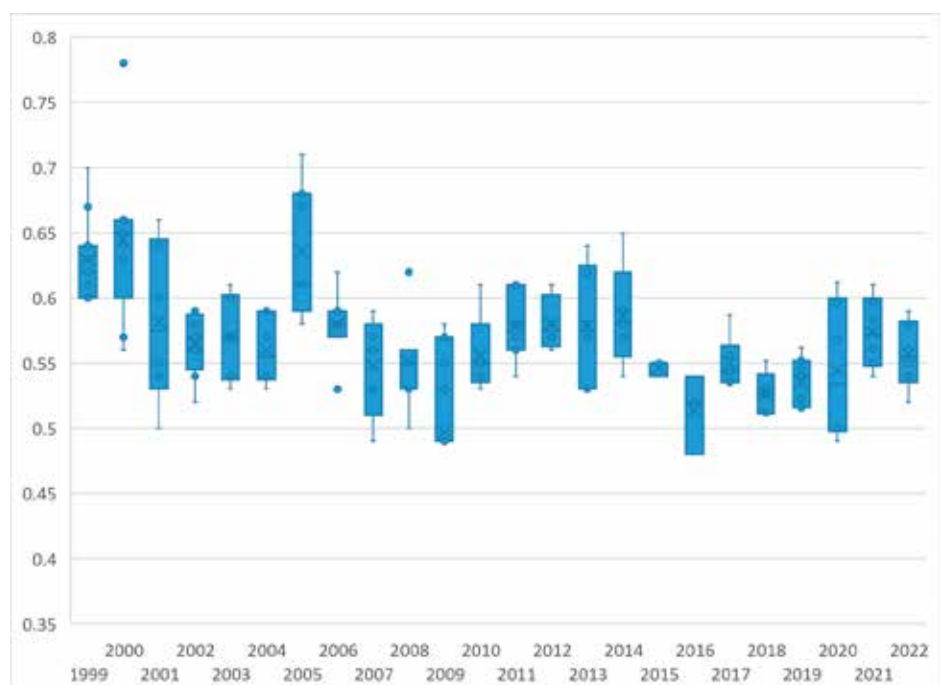


Figure 1: Proportion of barred birds in flocks

KIDS HELPING COCKIES UPDATE

Local school kids have been taking action to help our fussy eating Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos by continuing to grow and plant out stringybark seedlings at revegetation sites as part of the popular BirdLife Australia 'Kids Helping Cockies' Project.

This year saw eight local south east schools actively involved in learning about the habitat needs and threats to the birds, and propagating and planting stringybark seedlings.

Schools participating this year have included Allendale East Area School, Frances Primary School, Glenburnie Primary School, Lucindale Area School, Naracoorte South Primary School, Newbery Park Primary School, Suttontown Primary School and Tenison Woods College.

Students navigate their way through the entire process working from seed to feed. In doing so they gain practical skills in seed collection, planting and propagation, knowledge of conservation management methods and experience in applying those techniques to help create more food for Red-tails.

More than 365 students and 34 teachers/parent helpers have been engaged in the program over the last twelve months, bringing the total number of participants to 403. Students involved have propagated approximately 1600 and 120 stringybark and buloke seedlings respectively. Of those propagated around 1000 have been planted at RTBC habitat revegetation sites across their range in the South-East of SA.

The students themselves helped to plant 1149 trees (313 stringybarks and 839 associated species) across eight sites on private land near Bangham, Dismal Swamp, German Flat, Lucindale and Naracoorte.

Planting events were undertaken in conjunction with Zoos SA Cockies Helping Cockies Program, which works with local farmers to fence and revegetate habitat for Red-tails on private land. Students also helped to guard seedlings to protect from grazing herbivores.

As always, planting sessions proved very popular with students, allowing them to get outside and engage with nature, learn new skills and take action for cockies.

If your school is interested in getting involved in the Kids helping Cockies Program over 2022-23 please contact myself on 0438 317 024 or email bronwyn.perryman@birdlife.org.au at any stage.

The BirdLife Australia 'Kids helping Cockies' Project is supported by the Limestone Coast Landscape Board through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program.

Bron Perryman, Kids helping Cockies Coordinator



*Naracoorte South Primary School students learn about the Red-tails.
Photo Credit: Bron Perryman*



*Allendale East
planting day*

*Photo Credit:
Bron Perryman*

MANAGING PINE INVASION IN SOUTH-EASTERN RED-TAILED BLACK COCKATOO FEEDING HABITAT

The Glenelg Hopkins CMA (GHCMA) is currently working with DELWP to control pine invasion in South-eastern Red-tailed Black Cockatoo Stringybark feeding habitat. The project, funded through the Australian Government's Environmental Restoration Fund Priority Species Grants, aims to bring pine invasion down to a manageable level across 1166 ha of Stringybark habitat, ensuring the health of Stringybark fruit production and future recruitment.

DELWP are focusing their works on 916 ha of public land, including Roseneath State Forest, Drajurk State Forest, Nangeela State Forest and Wilkin Flora Reserve. Alongside this, GHCMA are engaging with private landholders in the same areas to coordinate pine removal across 250 ha of private land.

Over the past month, GHCMA have been undertaking surveys across 515 ha of privately owned SeRtBC habitat, mapping the locations of 2287 pine trees, saplings and seedlings. Pine density has generally varied from <1 to 16 pines per hectare (with the exception of one outlier property where 72 pines per ha were recorded). Pine density has generally been highest for areas in close proximity or adjacent to existing pine plantations. Over the coming months contractors will be engaged to undertake control works, with the project scheduled for completion in March 2023.

Ben Zeeman, Glenelg Hopkins CMA



*Photos of a mapped pine seedling, a pine sapling and a mature tree
Photo Credit: Ben Zeeman*

RED-TAIL ART DONATION IN EDENHOPE

On a recent visit to the Edenhope Library / Community Centre, I was amazed and delighted to see a stunning new sculpture of a pair of Red-tailed Black Cockatoos hanging on the wall. Some investigation revealed that the newly displayed work was by Willunga coppersmith Luke Craig. The beautiful and unusual bas-relief sculpture was donated to the people of Edenhope by former resident Julie Hocking (nee Greenwood) whose family lived in Edenhope for many years.

I encourage everyone who possibly can, to try to see this beautiful artwork (but check opening times for the library). What a great way to encourage interest amongst the local community in this endangered species.

Thank you very much Julie.

Ros Bradey

*The stunning artwork in the Edenhope Library
Photo Credit: Melanie Y'lang*



BLAIZE AID LENDS A HAND

For the farmers at Poolaijelo, 2021 was a great season. The winter wasn't too wet and the spring was just right for growing grass. In fact, there was so much grass that even though the local hay-sheds had been filled. The grazing sheep and cattle couldn't make a dent in it.

Although the weather wasn't too bad, the sheer mass of dry grass powered an extreme grass fire which burned over 7,000 hectares on New Year's Eve day. Properties just to the north of the tiny town of Poolaijelo copped the full force of the flames in the late afternoon. Although no houses or people were lost, there were a few farms in this area which lost everything else; 1000s of sheep, 100s of cattle, fences, sheds, farm equipment and pastures. In addition to suffering large losses of stock and grazing land a significant number of giant Red Gums and other trees were destroyed. The impacted area, which included Mereek Forest Reserve, is highly frequented by the South-eastern Red-tail Black Cockatoo. These recovery efforts have been important to maintain feeding habitat for the birds.

As if losing all this was not bad enough, the local farmers spent a great deal of time over the next few weeks manning the Poolaijelo firetruck, checking the perimeter of the fire and extinguishing smoldering remnants.

Within a few weeks however, BlazeAid brought a total of 39 volunteers from all around Australia to a base camp at the

Edenhope Showgrounds. They also brought some corporate funding with them in the form of recycled plastic posts made from 100% recycled plastic and were donated to BlazeAid by Australian beauty brand INIKA Organic as part of Waste Revolution's Plastic Neutral program. While being supported by numerous local community groups including the P & A Society and the Lions Club, BlazeAid also spent some time helping local farmers doing whatever they needed to do to get back on their feet.

After the BlazeAid crew had wrapped up and left, Kowree Farm Tree Group's Landcare Facilitator, Rachel Farran began working on potential tree planting projects. She redirected seedlings already ordered, planned projects with farmers and rounded up funds from a Wimmera CMA Victorian Landcare Grant. Thanks to Rachel for making this inspiring project happen.

This was not your typical Kowree Farm Tree Group job, where the focus is solely on providing habitat to endangered species. This was also about helping fellow community members who have had a tough time and need to know that they are not on their own. Great job to everyone involved.

Andrew Bradey, Kowree Farm Tree Group President

Rachel Farran, Victorian Local Landcare Facilitator



BlazeAid getting the job done near Poolaijelo.

COCKIES HELPING COCKIES UPDATE

South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos are set to benefit from fourteen thousand plus stringybark habitat seedlings planted across private land in the South-East as part of the very successful Zoos SA 'Cockies Helping Cockies' Project.

This long-running project has seen local farmers helping to increase stringybark feeding habitat for the cockatoos by revegetating patches, shelter belts and paddock trees as well as fencing and enhancing existing remnants to protect from stock. Plantings are multi-purpose, providing benefits not only to cockatoos and biodiversity but to farm productivity, including shelter and shade for stock, improved erosion control and beneficial insects.

Forty-five sites totalling over 88 ha have been revegetated or enhanced as part of this project over 2021-22. This has included the establishment of new shelter belts, paddock trees and patches, infill of existing stringybark remnants and installation of 470 mallee mesh guards to protect from browsing kangaroos and stock. A further 13 sites of intact remnant stringybark have been fenced and protected from stock.

In addition to the 14,198 trees planted over 2021-22, a further 2650 trees were replanted to back-fill gaps in the previous year's plantings. Sites to be replanted are identified through plant survival counts undertaken each year in March-April to determine percentage success. This year we had mixed success with an average of 63% survival across the 31 sites visited. Some sites exceeded 90% survival while several sites had poor success due to a combination of limited rainfall and insect defoliation over summer.

Revegetation is targeted in areas supporting existing stringybark habitat and/or where birds are known to feed and frequent. It also builds on previous revegetation efforts working from property to property, linking roadsides, existing remnants and conservation reserves to ensure habitat connectivity and continuity across the landscape.

Habitat management plans are tailored to suit individual properties and are developed in conjunction with the landholders to ensure mutual benefits to both farmers and cockies. Some of the aspects that makes this project appealing to landholders is the ease, flexibility in the scale and size of plantings, follow-up maintenance and collaborative approach taken to ensure plantings are successful.

This collaboration extends far beyond landholders and project staff - it supports all facets of the community from local nursery growers to local planting crews to local businesses who supply the fencing materials. It's a real community collaboration and something the locals are proud to be a part of.

While each property contributes individually, it's not until these are viewed 'collectively' that you start to get a sense of the scale and enormity of these efforts in helping to build, reconnect and secure food highways for the birds across the landscape.

Project staff would like to say a special thanks to all our landholders involved in the project and to our local growers Ralph Scheels (Eucaleuca Native Services, Naracoorte), Kathy Bell & Doug Nicholls (Southern Ground, Kingston), Peter Feast (Mimosa Farm Trees, Wye), Trees for Life (Adelaide) and BirdLife Australia's Kids Helping Cockies Project for supplying the trees for the project. Without your support this project would not be possible.

If you are interested in undertaking stringybark habitat restoration on your property, please contact Bron Perryman on 0438 317 024 to discuss how we can support you to achieve this.

The Zoos SA 'Cockies Helping Cockies' Project is supported by the Limestone Coast Landscape Board through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program.

*Bron Perryman, Habitat Contractor,
Zoos SA Cockies Helping Cockies*



The brilliant Cockies Helping Cockies planting crew



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POP QUIZ

Can you tell us what these strange growths are on roadside red gums in the Wimmera? If you are a red gum genius let us know at redtail@birdlife.org.au

Photo credit: Skye McPherson

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Skye McPherson

Project Coordinator, South Eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo Recovery Team

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