Red-tail News

Photo: David Adam

Issue 61 Summer 2025

INCREASED SIGHTINGS SUPPORT MONITORING

A huge thank you needs to go out to our amazing Red-tail community for the fantastic support they have given the program through sending in regular red-tail sightings. Every week we received several official sightings of SERTBC activity which help us to understand how the birds are using their habitat.

This year's reports have been very effective in strengthening our bioacoustic monitoring program and helping to ensure areas with high activity were prioritised for early deployment.

In late September, 60 audio moth recorders were set up across the species' range to help monitor breeding activity. The devices were installed on trees with a history of nesting or where nest boxes have been added to support breeding. By focusing on natural hollows and boxes that have been used before, the team increased the chances of recording active nests and successful fledging events. This targeted approach helps build a clearer picture of breeding success, rather than spreading monitoring too widely. Understanding how often nests fail is an important first step in identifying whether chick survival is a key challenge for the species, with further studies planned to explore other factors influencing breeding success. Field monitoring provided encouraging signs, with nesting activity observed at several natural and artificial sites. Female birds were seen entering and leaving nests—always a rewarding moment for observers, offering visual confirmation of breeding activity.

These recorders create three hours of recording daily which are analysed by the University of Queensland to monitor if known nests are active or not. The collation of this data over the years will help to inform the team of nesting success and failures and generate evidence-based recovery actions to support future successful breeding.

This season a further 11 recorders have been deployed in response to sightings around potential nest sites reported by the public. The use of the recorders allows us to monitor nest outcomes with minimal to no disturbance of nesting birds. Of these additional recorders five are monitoring for potential nesting activity in natural nests that have been previously unrecorded. If confirmed, this data will build upon the recovery team's understanding of nest use and outcome, helping to further refine evidence-based recovery initiatives.

All sightings of potential breeding behaviour are treated as highly sensitive to protect the birds from disturbance and the privacy of landholders. Thank you to Wayne Caldow, Tim Burnard, Evan Roberts, Oliver Wardle, Dani Texeira, Richard Hill and Bronwyn Perryman for their support and knowledge sharing with this year's nest monitoring program.

Rachel Farran,
SERTBC Recovery Project Coordinator

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A sighting of a pair of Red-tails feeding in the most recent Eucalyptus arenacea seed crop. Credit: R. Farran

birdlife AUSTRALIA

CHAIR UPDATE

After many years of dedicated service, Vicki-Jo Russell AM, more affectionately known as VJ, has advised that she will be stepping down as Chair of the South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo (SERTBC) Recovery Team. VJ has led the team for 14 of the past 16 years. Her leadership has been instrumental in strengthening governance, mentoring staff and guiding major conservation outcomes for the species.

Vicki-Jo has been a driving force behind initiatives such as large-scale revegetation, improved fire management and strong community engagement programs, leaving a lasting legacy for red-tail recovery. We also congratulate VJ on her recent appointment to the South Australian Tourism Commission, where she will continue to advocate for nature and regenerative outcomes. VJ will remain a recovery team member.

Bronwyn Perryman has accepted a nomination to step into the Chair role. As a long-standing member of the Recovery Team, Bronwyn brings strong regional knowledge and leadership experience. Mark Smith, Zoos SA has agreed to support Bronwyn as deputy Chair. We sincerely thank VJ for her wisdom, dedication and tireless advocacy.

RECOVERY TEAM POSITION STATEMENT ON WINDFARM DEVELOPMENT

The SERTBC Recovery Team has received an increasing number of requests to provide input and expert advice in reference to the current efforts to increase renewable energy developments. Most recently the team has provided input into Victoria's draft renewable energy handbook, a submission to the Kentbruck Green Power Hub near Nelson and a community consultative workshop with Vic Grid for the proposed South-west renewable energy development zone near Coleraine.

The Recovery Team supports an environmentally-responsible transition to renewable energy as part of a suite of initiatives to mitigate climate change. This includes, for the benefit of biodiversity under pressure from climate change impacts. However, we also recognise that both the construction and operation of renewable energy infrastructure such as wind turbines, can have a significant impact on birds and other wildlife and measures must be taken to minimise these impacts.

The team has worked to develop a position statement outlining considerations for wind farm developments within the Red-tail's range. This document is intended to support both proponents planning developments and groups seeking to provide submissions on potential developments. The SERTBC Recovery Team position statement to wind turbine development in the Red-tail's range is available for download on the website www.redtail.com.au or by emailing redtail@birdlife.org.au.

Vicki-Jo Russell and Rachel Farran, SERTBC Recovery Team

GROWING FOOD SECURITY

As part of the Australian Government's Natural Heritage Trust, our team in Western Victoria is working with the Wimmera Catchment Management Authority and Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority, to deliver on-ground outcomes for the critically endangered SERTBC.

A key recovery action is to address a predicted future food shortage by planting the three tree species these cockatoos rely on. This year Greening Australia have planted 10,000 brown stringybarks (*Eucalyptus baxteri*), 10,000 desert stringybarks (*Eucalyptus arenacea*) and 10,000 bulokes (*Allocasuarina leumanni*) in priority areas identified through the Recovery Team's habitat modelling. This modelling, which was conducted in 2019, identifies revegetation areas of high value to the birds.

A successful outcome resulting from past revegetation efforts is Bank Australia's Conservation Landbank reserve where Red-tails are regularly sighted. It can take 15 years for these trees to produce a good supply of cockatoo food, so planting in areas protected under conservation covenants ensures Greening Australia's work is also protected into the future.

Jess Gardner and Dave Warner, Greening Australia

10,000 desert stringybark seedlings loaded for transportation to planting sites.

Credit: R. Farran

SUCCESS WITH PADDOCK TREE PROJECT

Paddock trees are a defining feature of the Australian landscape, delivering important benefits for wildlife, agriculture, carbon storage and community wellbeing. Yet across the Limestone Coast, research shows these iconic trees are in decline, with few young trees replacing ageing paddock giants.

The Limestone Coast Paddock Tree Project, delivered by Trees For Life and supported by the Limestone Coast Landscape Board, is helping landholders reverse this trend. The project provides free seedlings, tree guards and fencing materials, along with practical advice, planting guides and locally tested guard construction videos. Eligible landholders can plant and protect between 25 and 100 paddock trees on their properties, supporting healthier and more resilient landscapes.

Results collected so far in a recent audit showed that since 2021, the project has engaged 108 landholders, resulting in more than 4,000 new paddock trees planted and guarded, over 250 remnant paddock trees protected across at least 12 hectares, and 267 naturally regenerating paddock trees safeguarded. Audits of these outcomes are ongoing, with GPS mapping and long-term monitoring planned to track tree survival and growth.

The project has also strengthened relationships with landholders, increasing awareness of Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos in the landscape and encouraging ongoing reporting of sightings. The project is currently set to continue until June 2026, with plantings scheduled for May–June.

Samantha Rothe, Paddock tree officer SE, Trees for Life

An example of a sturdy locally tested guard made from a recycled IBC shuttle cage.

Photo: Samantha Rothe

CREATING RED-TAIL HABITAT AT BAHGALLAH

On Friday 1st August, Grades 3 and 4 from Casterton Primary School spent a day at Sarah and Eva's property in Bahgallah planting and guarding stringybark seedlings to help provide a food source for Red-tails. Rachel and Bronwyn from Birdlife Australia organised the day and shared lots of interesting information with the students. The students learned that SERTBC feed on the seeds of stringybarks (Brown and Desert) and Bulokes. They nest in tree hollows (usually in dead trees).

The students work formed part of a wider revegetation of 3.5ha of stringbark habitat on the property by Greening Australia, as part of the Glenelg Hopkins CMA NHT project funded by the Australia Government. The trees planted by the students were grown from seed harvested and sown by them in late 2024 through a series of excursions with Bronwyn.

The students finished the excursion by listening to and identifying bird calls and having a close look at frog spawn and tadpoles. They hope the little trees grow and ensure the Red-tails never become extinct.

Jo Rhook, teacher Casterton Primary School

Casterton primary students planting and guarding seedlings at Bahgallah

Credit: R. Farran

DR PAUL KOCH PRESENTS FIRE MANAGEMENT CASE STUDY AT AOC

In November Dr Paul Koch, a recovery team member and specialist in understanding stringybark habitat, presented at the Australian Ornithological Conference in Perth. His presentation covered two decades of research and the resulting collaborative approach to fire management which is enhancing habitat quality for the endangered SERTBC.

On public land, planned burns have a temporary but prolonged (average of ten years post-fire) impact on stringybark food supply and thus fire management needs to be carefully managed. The Recovery Team has been successfully working in partnership with the Victorian state government using twenty years of research to inform fire management practices that ensure at least 85% of stringybark feeding habitat has not experienced crown scorch in any ten-year period.

The impact of fire on habitat productivity has been known and managed for many years, but climate change is now shifting the goal posts. Wildfires are becoming more frequent and widespread and drought stress is causing widespread declines in stringybark seed supply, with recruitment of juvenile birds into the cockatoo population declining as a result.

Dr Koch's presentation shared the learnings of the SERTBC Recovery Team as we continue to draw on research to inform adaptive management and a collaborative approach to fire management to give this cockatoo the best chance of survival into the future.

Dr Paul Koch, SERTBC Recovery Team, Science Working Group, Chair

PLANTING WEEKEND CREATES FUTURE FEEDING HABITAT AT MT ARAPILES

Horsham and District Landcare Network held a very successful community planting weekend near Mt Arapiles on 20–21 July. With the support of 20 enthusiastic volunteers, 2,400 native trees and shrubs were planted over the weekend. This included 478 Bulokes, vital future feeding habitat for the SERTBC who regularly inhabit the area. This fantastic effort will help restore biodiversity and create important habitat for decades to come. Special thanks to the landholders for hosting and preparing the site, and to committee members Mirinda and Iestyn for their behind-the-scenes work. The project was proudly supported by the Wimmera CMA and Victorian Landcare Grants.

Jennifer Gao, Landcare Facilitator, Horsham and Districts Landcare Network

The planting weekend provided an opportunity to learn more about the local habitat from bushland restoration expert Mirinda Thorpe.
Credit: Jennifer Gao

ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERS SUPPORT RED-TAIL CONSERVATION

The Environment Group at Penola Primary School has been busy this year learning about SERTBCs. The students participated in the annual count and were thrilled to see 63 birds as they flew into roost for the night.

Following on from the Annual Count, the students were inspired to do something to contribute to the conservation of the birds. They decided to plant Brown Stringybark seedlings that will provide habitat and food for future birds.

The students used some of their recycling money to buy 50 seedlings and took them to the farm to enhance the great revegetation work that has already been done by the Skeer family. The students spent the morning planting these new trees and putting guards around them.

The students are looking forward to seeing these trees grow up and hopefully helping the Red-tail numbers to increase.

Penola Primary School would like to thank Jess and James Skeer for hosting the group this year and for providing such a rich learning opportunities for their students.

The Environmental Leaders and teacher Matt Crew, Penola Primary School

The Environmental Leaders aren't the only class learning about Red-tails at Penola Primary School, here are some booklets created by Grade Reception/1 students.

Credit: R. Farran

NEWBERY PARK PRIMARY STUDENTS SHOWCASE RED-TAILS AT SCIENCE AND WONDERING FAIR

BirdLife Australia has been working collaboratively with Newbery Park Primary School for more than a decade to grow and plant food trees for SE Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos, as part of the '*Kids Helping Cockies*' Program.

A key focus of the program is educating students on the habitat and conservation needs of the cockatoo and engaging them in recovery initiatives to help increase future feeding habitat. Over the years, the school has grown thousands of seedlings, which have been planted at key revegetation sites across the Lower Southeast.

This year, Kasey David's Year 2/3 class with the support of Angela Jones invested a considerable amount of class time researching and learning about the cockatoo and sharing their learnings with the broader school community.

On the 17th of September, the class showcased their Red-tail information and explanation reports, along with other work centred around the cockatoos, as part of the school's 'Science and Wondering Fair'. I was fortunate enough to attend the event and wow what an amazing job they did in promoting 'Kids helping Cockies' and SE Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos. Their display was fabulous, from information reports to dioramas, photo displays and a beautiful and bold RTBC paper collage. The students should be exceptionally proud of their efforts and environmental stewardship.

Earlier in the year, the students also helped plant 207 trees on private land near Mt McIntyre as part of the 'Cockies helping Cockies' Project and have recently been involved in seed sowing sessions to grow more stringybark for the 2026 planting season.

A special thanks to Angela Jones, Kasey David and all the year 2/3 students for another amazing year of work supporting our Red-tails. We look forward to continuing our partnership next year.

Bron Perryman, Kids Helping Cockies Coordinator

Caption

Credit: Photographer

A WORD FROM THE STUDENTS

"I have learnt that Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos do not actually eat insects and nectar and flowers and berries. But those that are native to here eat Brown Stringybark, Buloke trees and Desert Stringybark."

Xavier, Year 2

"We learnt the difference between a Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo and a Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo. One difference is that they eat different things. One similarity is they both nest in tree hollows."

Thelma, Year 3

FUN AND LEARNING AT THE SCIENCE FAIR

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ZOOS SA 'COCKIES HELPING COCKIES' 2025 PLANTING UPDATE

South East Farmers continue to support stringybark revegetation efforts for the endangered South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo across the Limestone Coast in South Australia as part of the long-running Zoos SA 'Cockies Helping Cockies' Project.

This project focuses on revegetating sites in high value areas, connecting new plantings with existing remnants, and building on previous restoration efforts for the cockatoos. Since 2009, 560 hectares of stringybark feeding habitat has been revegetated and 650 hectares of remnant stringybark protected.

This year thirteen new sites, totalling 27.84 hectares, have been revegetated with stringybark during the 2025 planting season. This consisted of a mix of patch plantings and shelter belts across eight landholder properties located from Mount Gambier to Senior, SA. Revegetation sites were selected to connect existing remnants and/or build on existing revegetation efforts.

Plantings are diverse, comprising a mix of stringybark and associated tree and shrub species. A total of 2710 stringybarks (*Eucalyptus arenacea and Eucalyptus baxteri*) and 5449 associated species were planted across sites, totalling 8159 seedlings.

Dry conditions over spring and summer 2024 meant that some sites required replants to ensure greater than 70% percentage survival. This saw an additional 783 stringybarks, 165 bulokes and 1570 associated species replanted across ten sites planted in previous years.

Volunteers from Zoos SA and Trees for Life (TFL) Bush Action Team kindly assisted with this year's replants. Teams were rewarded for their efforts with both groups lucky enough to sight Red-tails on the last day of their respective trips in May and August.

Zoos SA would like to extend their thanks to everyone involved in helping to revegetate stringybark habitat this season, including our fabulous CHC landholders for providing sites for restoration, planting team members and volunteers, native growers including Eucaleuca Native Services, Southern Ground, Trees for Life and Mimosa Farm Trees, tree well contractor Dale Simpson, guard and stake supplier Arborgreen, Limestone Coast Landscape Board Conservation Staff and to all the other participants that help to make this project such a success.

Stringybark plantings will not only increase future feeding habitat for Red-tails but provide many other benefits to biodiversity and farm productivity, including shelter and shade for stock, improved erosion control and beneficial insects.

The Zoos SA 'Cockies Helping Cockies' Project has been funded by the Australian Government's Natural Heritage Trust and delivered by the Limestone Coast Landscape Board, member of the Regional Delivery Partners Panel.

If you are interested in undertaking stringybark habitat restoration on your property, please contact me on 0438 317 024 to discuss how this might be achievable.

Bron Perryman, Zoos SA Cockies Helping Cockies Habitat Contractor

Members from the Zoos SA CHC Planting Crew (from left to right) Adam Perryman, Cheryl Ferguson, Rachel Smith and Kerry Gilkes.

Revegetation of stringybark habitat at Western Flat, SA.

2026 COCKY CALENDAR

Upcoming community events where you can learn more about the recovery project

DATE	EVENT	LOCATION	TIME
6 February	Community talk on SERTBC recovery project	Edenhope Library	2.30 pm (AEDT)
14 February	Henley on Lake Wallace - display	Henley Park - Edenhope	from 2.00 pm (AEDT)
20 February	Community talk on SERTBC recovery project	Edenhope Library	7.00 pm (AEDT)
22 February	Wood, Wine and Roses Festival - display	Heywood	from 11.00 am (AEDT)
20 March	South East Field Days - display	Lucindale	9.00 am - 5.00 pm (ACDT)
21 March	South East Field Days - display	Lucindale	9.00 am - 5.00 pm (ACDT)

COMMUNITY SERVICE FOR RED-TAILS

On 8 December, Good Shepherd College in Hamilton held a community service day, giving students the chance to support their community through a range of meaningful activities. While some students assisted a local goodwill café to host a Christmas lunch for disadvantaged community members or helped build a prosthetic limb, five students chose to support the recovery of the endangered SERTBC.

The students helped water and fertilise stringybark feed trees planted earlier this year, sow seed for future plantings and undertake a bird survey in stringybark habitat. Despite warm conditions, they worked with enthusiasm and determination, completing their tasks in record time. Students also learned how a 20-minute, two-hectare bird survey is conducted using BirData and Avenza maps, gaining valuable insight into conservation in practice and future career pathways. Thank you to Good Shepherd College, Dave Warne from Greening Australia, and landowners Sarah and Eva for making the day a success.

Rachel Farran, SERTBC Recovery Project Coordinator

Good Shepherd College Hamilton students hard at work tending to stringybark seedlings.

Credit: Matthew Outred

RED-TAIL MOSAICS FOR NATURE FESTIVAL, SA

As part of Nature Festival SA 2025, a creative mosaic workshop brought people together to celebrate nature while learning about programs supporting the South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo. Funded by a regional micro-grant, the workshop was held by BirdLife Australia with mosaic artist Jan Obst providing instruction and presentations from partnership programs involving Trees For Life SA and Zoos SA, with participants producing outstanding work while learning about Cockies Helping Cockies and paddock tree restoration.

Thank you to all participants for their enthusiasm, and to Jan Obst, Bronwyn Perryman, Samantha Rothe, Nature Festival SA and Trees For Life SA for sharing knowledge and supporting this inspiring regional event.

Participants Anne and Carolynne share their mosaics
Credit: Samantha Rothe

TRIBUTE TO FOUNDING MEMBER AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHAMPION JIM MCGUIRE

In November, we sadly farewelled a founding Recovery Team member, colleague and environmental champion, Jim McGuire. Jim was widely respected for his deep knowledge, practical problem-solving and unwavering willingness to speak up for the environment—often fiercely, always with purpose.

A passionate advocate for the SERTBC, Jim helped shape much of the early science behind the species' food sources and habitat needs, working with scientist Dr Bill Emison and first Red-tail Project Officer, Wayne Caldow. His practical ingenuity led to many innovative, low-cost recovery solutions through his years as part of the Recovery Team.

Jim helped to design and install the very first artificial nesting boxes, utilising salvaged hollows from fallen trees and installing them on decommissioned power poles. His work with project officers was instrumental in installing steel/ then plastic collars around the trunks of dead nest trees to deter brush tail possums. His next idea to use high-density polyethylene plastic offcuts from the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline supplied the program with years of cost-effective possum banding. Through a dedicated ongoing maintenance program many of the early artificial nests Jim installed are still standing today.

Jim was a passionate advocate and change agent in the appropriate use of fire in stringybark habitat through minimising the impact of burning on Red-tail feeding habitat. Recognising the need for practical solutions he commissioned a trial project focused on investigating if minimum-scorch burns could be done in stringybark, particularly in areas of high fuel. The results from this project showed that burns could be conducted in a manner which achieved less than 30% crown scorch. Jim's project with low intensity burns has been very useful when planning low intensity burns.

Jim played a pivotal role from the earliest days of native vegetation clearing controls, working to guide councils and landholders through challenging conversations about balancing development with environmental protection. Renowned for his commitment to compliance, he served as Acting State Manager for the unit, bringing integrity, passion and a strong sense of fairness to the role. Jim pioneered an intelligence-led approach that uncovered serious offences, including the illegal taking of wildlife and harvesting of flora from Crown land. His dedication often extended to weekends and after hours, and he worked closely with national authorities on several major cases.

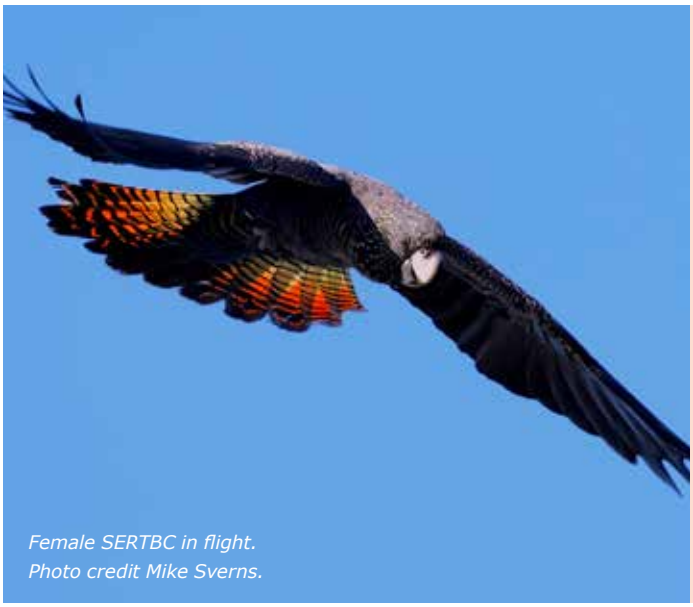
A passionate advocate for Red-tails, Jim's ongoing work with the Recovery Team has formed the basis of many of our subsequent actions. He has supported and participated in the Annual Count for most of the years it has been running. His favourite site to survey being Wait's State Forest. Jim's legacy is one of steadfast commitment to protecting our natural environment.

Compiled from contributions by Jim's colleagues and members of the Recovery Team, in particular Geoff Miller, DEECA and Wayne Caldow, previous Recovery Project Officer.

Jim with his beloved dogs Starsky and Hutch. Credit: Mike Sverns

Jim McGuire, far left, was a highly valued member of the Red-tail recovery team, photo taken November 2013

Credit: B Perryman



Female SERTBC in flight.
Photo credit Mike Sverns.

VALE SHEREE MIRTCHIN

We are saddened to acknowledge the passing of Sheree Mirtchin, a highly valued member of the Recovery Team who represented the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) Far Southwest region.

Sheree was a calm, caring and positive presence, whether working alongside the team or in the Heywood office. With more than 21 years' service in the Forest and Fire Operations Division, she was widely respected for her knowledge, professionalism and commitment to best-practice fire management. Her expertise and collaborative approach played an important role in strengthening the partnership between the Recovery Team.

Our thoughts are with her family, friends and colleagues at this difficult time.

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