



Red-tail News

Issue 62: Winter 2026



*A playful pair of
red-tails
Photo credit:
Justin McManus*


birdlife
AUSTRALIA

Welcome to the 62nd edition of our newsletter, showcasing the people, partnerships and innovations driving conservation for the South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo, with a focus on celebrating 30 years of our Annual Count.

This issue features habitat restoration updates from the Trees For Life Paddock Tree Project and our work with Greening Australia, alongside opportunities to secure and protect habitat with Trust for Nature. We also share exciting developments in environmental DNA (eDNA), expanding conservation knowledge, and new insights from bioacoustic monitoring.

The results from our Annual Count are in, with a strong focus on the stories and experiences of volunteers over the past 30 years. I highly recommend reading the reflections shared by some of our longest-standing Annual Count volunteers. Thank you to Chris, Gloria, Geraldine and Glenda for taking the time to share your insights and for your ongoing support of the count. Accompanying their stories are some incredible images taken on count day, thank you to all those who have shared their photographs for use in this and other publications.

There are many people to acknowledge in this edition, and while the list is long, I would like to highlight a few. Thank you to Evan Roberts for his dedication and the many hours he contributes to the recovery project. Thank you also to Wayne Caldwell and Tim Burnard for sharing their knowledge and training, and to Tim for generously donating a bird hide to support flock counting. Thank you to Dr Pam Whiteley for her time informing our Annual Count volunteers on reporting wildlife health, sharing her knowledge on H5 bird flu and her support to the program.

A sincere thank you to landowners who allow access for monitoring work—your support is invaluable. Thank you also to the broader community for celebrating our birds and supporting recovery efforts through reporting sightings, enabling access, undertaking revegetation and protection, and raising awareness. Most importantly, thank you to Annual Count volunteers, both new and returning, for your incredible contribution over the past 30 years.

Finally, thank you to the recovery team for your ongoing advice, support and dedication, and especially to the chairs for their hard work during this time of transition.

On behalf of the team I would like to thank Peter and Lynne for their generous donation to the program. We are very grateful for your contribution to the important conservation work carried out in the program.

Enjoy reading, Rachel Farran, South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo recovery project coordinator.

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The South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo recovery team and BirdLife Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the Country on which we live and work, and we pay our respects to their Elders past and present. We recognise and are grateful for the immense contribution of Indigenous people to caring for country across the range of the South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo.



Trust for Nature - protecting Red-tail habitat now and into the future

Conservation organisation Trust for Nature is working with landholders across south west Victoria to protect vital habitat for the South-east Red-tailed Black-cockatoo, where much of the species' key feeding and nesting habitat has been cleared for agriculture.

While national parks and other reserves are vital for the cockatoos, protecting the birds' remaining habitat on private land is also critical. Fires that burned over 70 per cent of the Little Desert National Park in 2025 highlight the importance of other refuges in the landscape.

Landholders can play a crucial role in protecting and improving habitat for black-cockatoos, through controlling pests and weeds, safeguarding hollow-bearing trees, and planting the cockatoos' food trees.

One shining example is the Bank Australia Conservation Reserve (read more in the Trust for Nature's Conservation Bulletin [[LINK: TFN-Conservation-Issue83-March2026-final-V2-A4-web.pdf](#)]).

Trust for Nature is currently seeking expressions of interest from landholders in the Wimmera to permanently protect black-cockatoo and Malleefowl habitat. Please get in contact with Project Manager: Laura McLean (0427 378 103 or lauram@tfn.org.au) or Area Manager: Phoenix Wolfe: (0417 042 486 or phoenixw@tfn.org.au) if you would like to get involved.

This project is funded by the Australian Government's Natural Heritage Trust and delivered by the the Wimmera CMA, a member of the regional delivery partners panel.

Support for Trees for Life's Paddock Tree Project remains strong

Recently, on Meintangk Country in Naracoorte, we had one of our favourite days on the Limestone Coast Paddock Tree Project calendar: Depot Day.

36 landholders from across the region - from Sherwood in the north to Mingbool in the south - came to the Trans Australian Livestock and Freight Management yard to collect seedlings and guard materials for the planting season ahead. Landholders have committed to planting and guarding 800 paddock trees this season, using a variety of different guard types depending on the expected livestock pressure.

Depot day is a big logistical undertaking but also a reminder of what this project is really about - landholders who genuinely care about the future of their properties and the paddock trees that define them.

Once home, the real work begins. Planting. Guarding. Monitoring. Checking for livestock pressure, weed competition and soil moisture. It's patient, ongoing work, and every single one of these landholders is committed to it.

Each year we welcome new participants to the Paddock Tree Project journey, and each year the next generation of paddock trees in the Limestone Coast grows a little stronger.

We're now starting to see paddock trees growing over the tops of their guards. Those young trees - protected, established, reaching for the sky - are exactly what this project has been working towards.

A huge thank you to the team who made Depot Day possible - Robbie Andrew, Vanessa Freebairn and Kylie Pethybridge from the Limestone Coast Landscape Board, Stuart Gonda from Trees For Life, and the incredible team at Trans Australian Livestock and Freight Management who assisted all day with forklifting, loading and more. We couldn't do it without you.

Stay tuned for Expressions of Interest for the 2026/27 season - these will open once funding is confirmed.

This project is supported by the Limestone Coast Landscape Board with funding from the Regional Landscape Levy and delivered by Trees for Life.

Samantha Rothe, Paddock tree coordinator SE, Trees for Life



*A very successful Depot Day was held on the 26th of May 2026.
Photo credit: Stuart Gonda*



Food for the future – Greening Australia continues its Stringybark enhancement program

Supported by Wimmera Catchment Management Authority with funding from the Australian Government's National Heritage Trust program this year GA worked with Index Forestry to plant 20,000 stringybarks across 200 hectares between the east and western blocks of the Little Desert National Park. These plantings are addressing an observed lack of canopy recruitment within remnant vegetation ensuring there is a future generation of food producing trees for the South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo. Its important that we plant both *Eucalyptus arenacea* (Desert Stringybark) and *Eucalyptus baxteri* (Brown Stringybark) as the two species have differing flowering and seeding cycles. This way we hope there will be food available across the years. It's satisfying to look back over our previous years work on this program which are now gaining some height and imagine the impact we will have in the future. We now know from several observations across the range of the cockatoo that it takes around 15 years for a planted seedling to become a productive food source. This knowledge is encouraging and motivating. Lets all keep up the good work for this amazing bird as we are making a difference in the longer term.

Jess Gardner, Greening Australia



Greening Australia's tree planting crew putting in stringybark seedlings amongst remnant vegetation to provide food for red-tails. Photo credit: Jess Gardner



Stringybark seedling planted in 2025. These seedlings will increase the stringybark canopy in remnant vegetation. Photo credit: Jess Gardner



Bioacoustic monitoring results from 2024/25 with some exciting news for the 2025/26 season

The results are in! Bioacoustic data collected during the 2024/25 breeding season has been analysed and validated. During the season a total of 76 artificial and natural breeding hollows were monitored using tiny audiomoths installed at the base of the tree. These recorders are automatically programmed to start recording during periods when nest activity is likely. The data collected allows researchers to analyse if the nest was used, if breeding activity stopped early or midway through the expected nesting period, or if a chick is likely to have fledged or left the nest. This method allows monitoring of breeding activity in a way that produces almost no disturbance of the nesting birds.

The results from the 2024/25 monitoring season show lower breeding activity with only 10 active nests and 66 nests not used. This supports earlier research findings that highlight the importance of abundant feed supply to support nest success. Food availability monitoring across the range was low in 2024/25 likely leading to reduced breeding attempts.

Of the 10 active nests (i.e., 13% of monitored nests were used), 5 nests (50% of active nests) were deemed to have fledged or potentially fledged. Nestlings were recorded at 6 active nests. Nest outcome was unknown for 5 nests. 66 nests were not used by red-tailed black-cockatoos during the period they were monitored (inactive). Of 66 nests 22 were missing significant periods of data (20 – 100+ days) during which nesting activity may have occurred but was not recorded.

Where the outcome of the remaining active nests could not be determined, this is usually because the nest was still active when the sound recordings ended. This does not mean the nests have failed, rather there was insufficient data to confirm the chick successfully left the nest.

Ten nests were previously monitored in all monitoring seasons, i.e., 2019/20, 2020/21, 2021/22, 2022/23 and 2023/24. Six of these nests were used in multiple years, but only one nest was used every year. Across all nests monitored, 21 have been used in at least two seasons.



A stunning image of a juvenile. Photo credit: Andy Johnson

Data for the 2025/26 breeding season has been collected with promising observations indicating potential nesting activity. This year 69 audiomoths have been deployed at known nesting sites to monitor any potential breeding activity. With nesting activity observed over a longer period this season, recorders we deployed for slightly longer, although at some sites battery failure reduced the length of deployment.

In a very exciting development 14 potential new natural nests were monitored in 2025/26. These nests were either observed in by local land managers or members of the SERTBC team, leading to new use of bioacoustics in confirming potentially active nests. These results may produce some exciting findings, with new potential nesting areas identified. The data is currently being processed by the Queensland University of Technology (QUT), with Daniella Teixeira and Oliver Wardle waiting to validate the results.

We would like to extend our appreciation to Dani, Oli, Richard Hill, Bronwyn Perryman, and all the landowners who supported nest monitoring over 2024/25 and 2026. It is a big task, that produces very important results. Thank you so much for your support time and effort.





Advancing conservation through eDNA, exciting developments for the South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo

In 2020 a landmark study revealed that Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos (*Calyptorhynchus banksii*) across Australia fall into five distinct genetic groups, reshaping how scientists understand the species. The South-eastern subspecies (*Calyptorhynchus banksii graptogyne*) stood out as particularly vulnerable, showing the lowest genetic diversity of all the red-tail subspecies. A recent more detailed analysis of the 2020 study by Cesar Australia, as part of the study below, indicating that genetic drift has played a strong role in the genetic distinctiveness of the subspecies. The population is genetically unique, but also more highly at risk. These findings were also able to provide an essential baseline for future monitoring and interpreting genetic patterns for further research.

Traditional genetic sampling methods rely heavily on tissue collection. This poses a challenge for studying the South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo due to the need to capture birds which poses a risk of stress or injury to the bird. Recent advances in genetic research have allowed for the development of new tools for DNA analysis based on field-based DNA collection through scats (droppings) and feathers. Previously these had not been suitable due to degradation of the DNA making it unsuitable for analysis.

This ground breaking study conducted by Dr Andrew Weeks, Dr Anthony van Rooyen and Dr Peter Kriesner of Cesar Australia developed and validated a non-invasive genetic monitoring approach tailored to the Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo using scats and feathers collected in the field. The study validated the method using field samples consisting of 32 feather samples and 71 scats collected by Richard Hill. A total of 57 unique samples were genotyped as 49 individual birds (two feather samples and three scat samples were from the same individual). This validation proved the technique can reliably identify individuals.

This new sampling method shows further potential in that it allows for population estimation using spatially explicit capture-recapture models, without the need for live trapping the birds. With further development these tools may provide a useful field-based method, allowing for repeated sampling over time. This would enable long-term monitoring of population trends, genetic diversity, and relatedness while minimising disturbance to birds. The end results will be the ability to inform conservation efforts for the South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo with more targeted, informed, and impactful monitoring, helping ensure the survival of this unique subspecies into the future.

We would like to gratefully acknowledge the work of Richard Hill and Cesar Australia in conducting this important research.



Photo credit: Justin McManus



A windy, rainy day yeilds great results for the 30th year of our Annual Cocky Count.

The 30th Annual Count of the South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo, held on 2 May, marked an important milestone for this long-running citizen science initiative, which began in 1996 to engage the community in monitoring the subspecies.

218 volunteers took part this year, including many long-term contributors who have supported the count since its early years. Their enthusiasm and commitment remain central to the success of the program, as they not only collect vital data but also promote awareness and inspire others to get involved in conserving this iconic species.

A total of 101 survey groups covered 88 mapped sites across the cockatoo's stringybark habitat, despite challenging weather conditions. Of these groups, 32 recorded bird sightings, including eight large flocks ranging from 60 to 250 individuals.

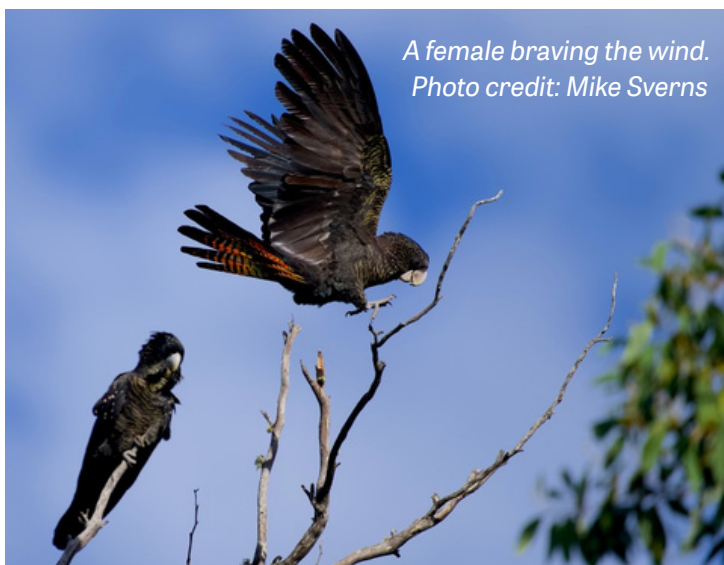
Survey effort was substantial, with volunteers covering more than 4,400 km over nearly 486 hours, using both scientific survey methods and the more flexible "Drive in the Park" approach. After accounting for duplicate observations, a total of 1,443 birds were recorded—a better total than the 885 birds counted in 2025. This increase reflects improved detection with larger (noisier) flocks counted and increased survey effort rather than a sharp rise in population size. With 17 additional groups participating, groups were able to survey smaller areas and concentrate their efforts. While this saw some duplicate effort, this additional information was valuable in learning how the birds are using the habitat and in validating the Annual Count data.

The Annual Count plays a critical role in long-term monitoring by providing a minimum population estimate and identifying flock locations for follow-up surveys, which help track trends in the species over time.

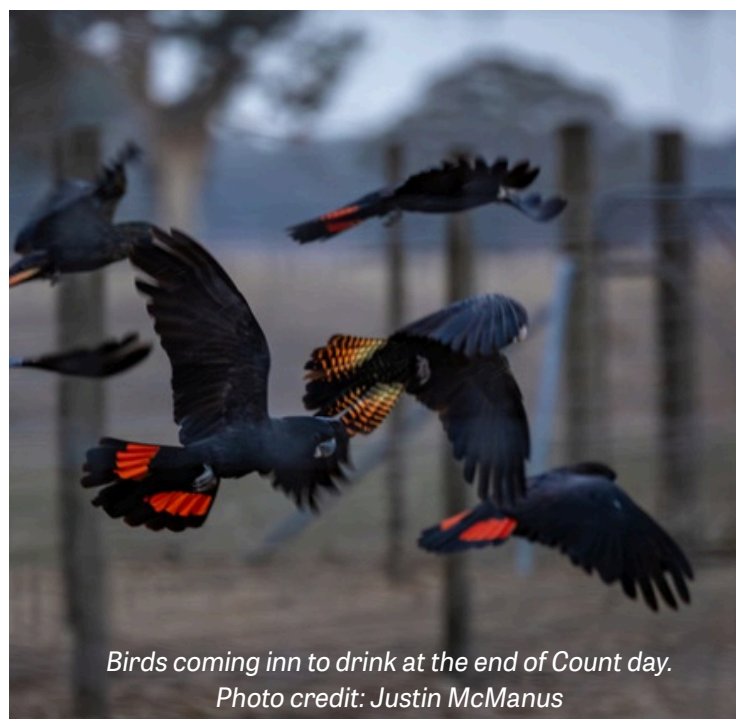
This year's event also brought together a diverse mix of participants from across Victoria and South Australia. It began with a Welcome to Country by Gunditjmara Elder Aunty Cathy Muroe and concluded with the Baileys' Rocks campout, where dedicated participants gathered—despite heavy rain—to share results and experiences.

Special thanks to Pam Whiteley, who presented valuable information on Australia's avian flu preparedness and the wildlife health surveillance program run through the University of Melbourne's School of Veterinary Science at both the Annual Count training session and the campout.

The long-running Annual Count's success relies on the amazing collective effort of its volunteers and supporters. Sincere thanks are extended to all who participated, contributed sightings and promoted the event. Special recognition goes to Evan Roberts for his dedicated advocacy, community engagement, and support in organising the count, including working closely with landholders. Thank you to those volunteers who contributed photographs that support education and outreach, and lastly to Bronwyn Perryman and Richard Hill for their invaluable assistance in verifying the data.



*A female braving the wind.
Photo credit: Mike Sverns*



*Birds coming inn to drink at the end of Count day.
Photo credit: Justin McManus*



30 years of Cocky Counting! - Stories from the field



12 volunteers and staff from Zoos South Australia gave up their time to take part in the Annual Count.
Photo credit: Paul Kotz

The South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo count has taken flight again this year and another fantastic group of Zoos South Australia staff and volunteers gave up their time to search the stunning South-East for this elusive bird.

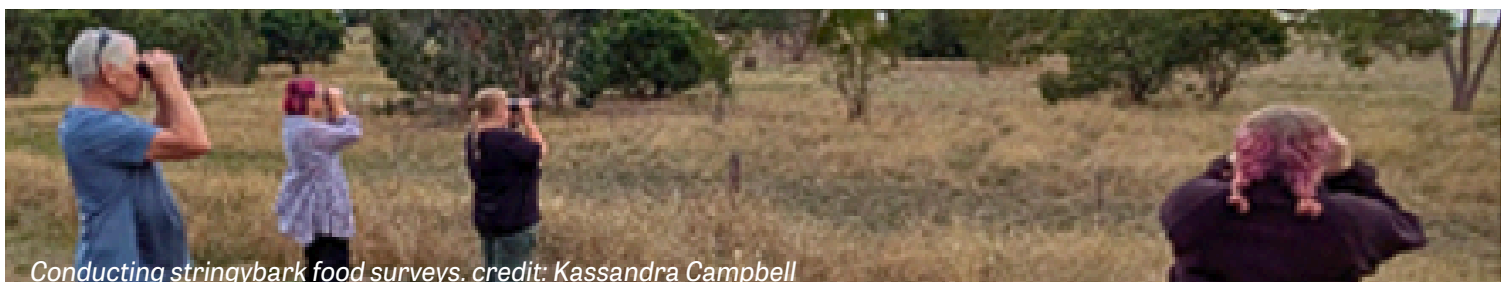
The trip was a great success with twelve pairs of eyes locked on the skies, (except the drivers watching the road!), in the hopes of sighting our red-tailed feathered friends. Species observed included Whistling Kites, Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos, Sulphur Crested Cockatoos, Kreffts gliders, Banjo frogs, rain moths, lots of cows and a Sleepy Lizard across 80km of surveyed areas, with some of those spotted later that night during a night walk.

Our official survey sites revealed no Red-tails, but we were invited to a private property (where large flocks were observed in recent weeks) in the hopes of catching a glimpse of these beautiful birds. Upon arriving we headed towards the homestead with our windows down, searching the skyline and listening intently. Imagine our delight to be greeted by the unmistakable call of some Red-tails in the distance! Excitement levels were soaring but short lived, as we discovered it was actually a sound recording from the car up front!

Disappointed but not deterred, we set out in different directions across the property guided by our extremely lovely and welcoming landowners, Kieren and Sally, who have done extensive revegetation on their property as part of the Zoos SA Cockies helping Cockies program. One of the groups was lucky enough to catch a flock of Red-tails settling into roost for the evening!

Spotlighting, cave tours, Red-tails and more on this year's Cockatoo count, making it a truly spectacular trip for all involved!

Kassandra Campbell, Zoos SA conservation team member, Adelaide Zoo



Conducting stringybark food surveys. credit: Kassandra Campbell





A male taking flight. Photo credit: Chris Farrell

What a cracker of a Count!

This year's count was one to remember. I was joined by friends Lou and Lisa Dall'Est, along with Ian Westhorpe. Ian had taken part with me last year and was keen to return, while Lisa and Lou were first-timers.

I've been doing the count on and off for around two decades, usually going solo. Over that time I've covered various locations across western Victoria, though sightings have often been limited—just two pairs of Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos in all those years. More recently, I've spent the past three seasons surveying Caldows State Forest without seeing a single Red-tail—until this year.

Thanks to our coordinator, Rachel, I was introduced to local farmer and nature guide Wayne Caldows. Wayne shared that a group of around 12 Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos had been spotted along the centre track. With that promising lead, Lou, Lisa and I headed into the reserve on Friday afternoon to see if they were still around. To our absolute delight, we encountered a much larger flock—around 80 birds.

After meeting the evening before, we set a plan for the count. Ian and I would take the left track, while Lou and Lisa would cover the right, with the intention of regrouping in the centre.

It was a windy day, and as expected, the birds had taken shelter on the northern side—along the right track—where we'd seen them the previous afternoon. Although we could hear them as we arrived, the purpose of the count is to thoroughly survey the entire area, so Ian and I stuck to the plan and began along the left track.

Partway through, we had to adjust our route due to a fallen tree blocking the path on the western side. We returned to the start and continued along the centre track instead. While no birds were found there, once we reached the northern side we quickly relocated the flock—still numbering roughly 70 to 80 birds.

Lou and Lisa were already on that track, and at one point the birds flew directly overhead while they were near the car—an incredible sight. Altogether, we estimated between 80 and 100 birds, although counting was a challenge as they wheeled and shifted through the stringybark canopy.

I've included some photos from the day below. It was a fantastic team effort and a truly memorable count. We're all looking forward to next year—though as we know, with red tails, there are never any guarantees!

Chris Farrell, BirdLife Melbourne committee member and long-time Annual Count Volunteer



30 years of friendship, adventure and passion for Red-tails - the 3G's!

On the 2nd of May the three G's group, Geraldine, Glenda and Gloria, headed out to count cockies in the "old girl", a 1976 long wheeled base Landcruiser which has proved the ideal 'cocky count' vehicle. Geraldine's friend Pam also joined us this year as she has done several times before. We are a motley crew with many years of volunteering between us.

Gloria, the driver and owner of the 'old girl' has been doing the count ever since it began; thirty odd years ago and has not missed one! Gloria has often found Geraldine bogged on various tracks in her old gold Mercedes and helped her out over the years. In the end they decided to team up and do both their allotted areas, Edgar's and Yallakar State forests, together. This has proved to be beneficial for both parties; Geraldine records our sightings and maps the tracks travelled throughout the stringybark scrub.

The girls generally start out at around eight in the morning after picking up Geraldine from her Land for Wildlife Block off Tea Tree Creek Road and make sure maximum use of observation skills, such as looking and listening, are employed. More often than not the Red-tails are heard long before you see them so every set of eyes and ears are valuable! Geraldine has searched with Gloria for probably the last twenty plus years and travels from Stawell to do so.

It is always good to catch up every year for the count around the beginning of May when the birds start forming bigger flocks. The endangered Red-tailed Black Cockatoos need to drink daily and often have a favourite watering hole that they return to in the evening before roosting in tall trees. Seeing them drinking is the best chance you get to do flock counts to identify exact numbers of male and female birds as well as any juveniles otherwise known as banded birds due to their tails.



Geraldine and Pam and the 'old girl'
Photo credit: Gloria Freeman



Gloria and Pam ready for their 30th Annual Cocky Count.
Photo credit: Gloria Freeman

Searching for the Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos is like looking for living treasure and no one tires of finding them and contributing to their conservation. They are truly spectacular birds and watching them land, fly or grab a drink is just awesome. They eat the seeds of the brown stringy bark trees (*eucalyptus baxteri*) mainly and as the seeds are tiny they feed all day, happily chatting amongst themselves with the chewings falling to the forest floor sounding like rain. They are messy eaters, leaving lots of chewings beneath their restaurant trees and these are good indicators of recent activity by the birds. The restaurant trees (trees with a heavy seed crop preferred by the birds) are often along roadsides on the edge of the forests. Possibly the seed produced by these trees are more prolific due to less competition, bigger due to being edge trees or more nutritious as they grow on bigger more mature and probably older trees.

Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos are one of Australia's largest parrot species. They mate for life and generally prefer dead ring barked red gum nesting sites which have hollows more than 20 cms in diameter, into which the female backs and lays a single egg onto wood chips chewed from around the opening of the hollow high up. The male comes in the evening to call her out to nearby scrub where he regurgitates food for her and the chick after it hatches. She then returns to the nest to rear the young fledgling. They sometimes use the same nest site for several years although in recent times some have utilised artificial nests that have been erected by the recovery team and interested landholders. Many of the older nesting sites are being eaten out by white ants, felled for firewood or due to age, blown over in storms.



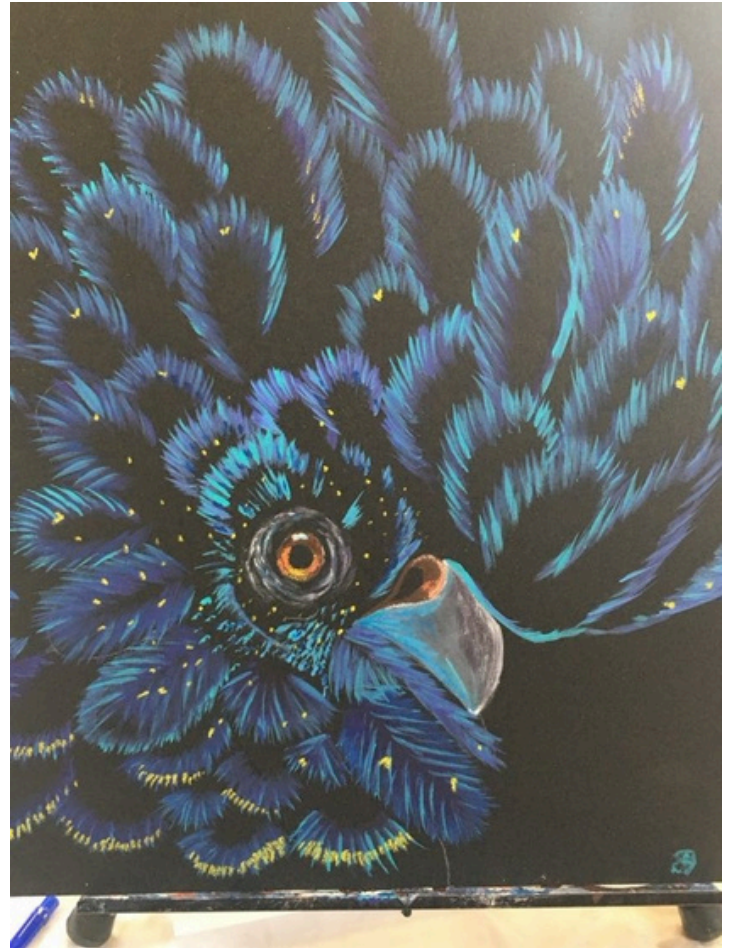
Finding enough food to sustain them as well as suitable nesting sites seems to be the main reasons for the decline of the South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos sub species.

Glenda joined the team much later. She lived in the area over 20 years ago, but wasn't so interested in birds then. She has developed a keen interest in birds now and especially Red-tails and is always keen to photograph them. She has been a regular on the count for the last seven or eight years, travelling up from Melbourne to participate.

The girls take various routes through the forest to try to maximise the chances of locating the birds as well as being mindful of the weather and track conditions. We have been bogged in both sand and mud over the years but have been able to problem solve and with help from the local policeman and neighbouring farmers, have managed to get out of difficult situations. It is all part of the experience. In fact, one time when we were bogged in clay, over a hundred birds came to check us out and even landed on the track close by. They were obviously curious and unafraid of us.

Sometimes the coordinator sends some newbies out with us so they can learn and hopefully have a good chance at spotting some birds and learning surveying techniques off our crew. We enjoy the chance to meet someone new.

Gloria Freeman, Annual Count volunteer of 30 years.



On the 3rd of May, following a successful day of counting Gloria and Glenda attended the Upper Glenelg Landcare paint and sip event at Dunrobin Hall hosted by artist Jacky Morris. Fittingly the subject for the workshop was the Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo. Photo credit: Gloria Freeman

Red-tails flying in to drink at sunset. Photo credit: Chris Farrell





Participating in the Annual Count has reinforced the importance of looking after habitat for Annual Count regular Glenda Wilson. Photo credit: Angela Leech

Cockatoo counting and the importance of protecting valuable habitat

I'm fortunate to be part of a dedicated team that conducts annual counts of South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos in Yallakar Forest, between Edenhope and Harrow. It's a long-standing effort, Gloria has been counting for over 30 years, Geraldine for more than 22, and I've been involved for the past decade.

Why such a long commitment? Because every sighting is special. Seeing a Red Tail never loses its magic, it brings a smile to your face and a spark to your heart. They are intelligent, captivating birds, and spending time observing them is a privilege. Gloria and I often spend time before and after the official count combing the Edenhope district to better understand their movements and feeding patterns.

Each year tells a different story. In 2025, I missed the count due to election work, something I found very disappointing. In 2024, we saw no birds on count day; there simply wasn't enough feed available. In contrast, 2023 was remarkable, we counted 400 birds just two days after the official count, a confirmed result and our largest tally at the time.

This year (2026), we recorded only 68 birds at Yallakar on count day. However, just two days later, we observed large flocks across three sites. We're now waiting to hear whether that number will be officially confirmed. Encouragingly, there was good seed on the stringybark trees this year, along with extensive clippings beneath them, clear signs of heavy feeding activity.

One of the most memorable experiences is quietly walking beneath a large flock. If you move calmly and respectfully, they seem to accept your presence. It's a magical feeling, being part of the bush, sharing space with these magnificent birds.

Yallakar is incredibly rich in habitat, with extensive areas of stringybark that are vital for the cockatoos. It's heartening to see that many people recognise the importance of preserving this unique strip of Red-tail country. However, ongoing vigilance is essential. Fire can devastate these habitats, once burnt, stringybark trees can take around 10 years to produce seed again.

There are also newer challenges. I recently observed a lifestyle block where land clearing restrictions appeared to have been bypassed by introducing animals that had ringbarked the stringybark trees. Feral deer are also becoming more prevalent in Yallakar. On count day we saw eight, but just two days later we encountered a herd of 30 deer.

Despite these pressures, my love for Yallakar only grows. It is a place of diverse and beautiful ecosystems. Home to banksias, orchids, Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos, wallabies, and a rich variety of other birds, plants, and wildlife. I hope that, in some small way, my contribution helps ensure that this remarkable species continues to thrive in south-west Victoria and south-east South Australia.

Glenda Wilson, Annual Count volunteer of 10 years



Red-tails, conservation and raising awareness via the Annual Count

I joined the Annual Red-tail Count around the year 2000 when the Cobboboonee National Park campaign was just underway.

Among the many groups and individuals who attended the Cobboboonee NP Campaign Launch in May 2000 was Gloria Freeman from Edenhope Field Naturalists. To my great fortune I was soon allotted Yallakar Forest and surrounds in the Red-tail Count Team led by Gloria. I have therefore been doing the count for around 25 years.

Very soon after the official launch of the Cobboboonee Forest NP Campaign the idea of protected areas north of the Cobboboonee Forest emerged. Even though the catalyst for the protection of the Cobboboonee was the presence of the Yellow-bellied Glider, discovered by the Portland FNC, our exploring of the woodlands and forests locally, and in the north, soon showed that much more was at stake. Into this category came the endangered Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos which travelled as far south as the Glenelg NP stringybarks and now and again, even into the Cobboboonee Forest.

It seemed obvious to me that not only the southern lands habitat, adjacent to the tall forests should be protected because of important nature values, but those to the north as well. This meant the unprotected Brown and Desert Stringybark Woodlands and remnant Buloke patches right up to the Little Desert NP, vital habitat for the Red Tails, needed permanent protection. I found it an exciting idea and was drawn into the world of the Red-tail!

Already being strongly motivated to work for the beautiful Red-tails an extra push for me came when in 2005 it was chosen as mascot for the 2006 Commonwealth Games in Melbourne! How could the Victorian Government not protect an endangered mascot's living places? But that is a story for another day!

I love so much about the Count Day ... driving around in wildly different weathers, days when you can hear the leaves dropping as the birds feed in the tree tops and days when it is so windy it is difficult to hear even the calls of the birds. Peering intently into the stringybarks seeing, perhaps, three or four red-tails, but excitement of heart mounting as you realize there are many more. Once, when we became bogged on a slippery track, the Red-tails were suddenly in the trees around us as if to soothe our frayed nerves.



A pair of South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos showing the barred feather patterning . Photo credit: Justin McManus

You can search all day, finding no Red-tails and then, and it has happened more than once, just before dusk, come across a group of birds drinking in a track puddle or settling noisily in tall gums for the night.

Morning teas and lunches beside waterholes, with or without water in them, seeing and listing other birds – numerous Flame Robins memorable one year - emus and wrens; watching the life of the banksias - growing, in lustrous flower, and then grey in their dying. There is an immense pleasure in getting to know these forests as the team returns each year. There is the sadness too, and, indeed a feeling of helplessness when planned burns impact favourite patches of food trees and old hollow animal shelters.

I enjoy contributing to scientific data in relation to the Red-tails. So even though looking forward to seeing them on a Count Day there is a peace in the sense that not seeing them is also contributing to knowledge. It is great working with the team and learning much over the years from others such as Richard Hill, Ros and Andrew Bradey, BirdLife coordinators such as Rachel Farran, to mention only a few.

Reuniting with our team each year for Site 26 Yallakar Forest and environs has become a meeting of friends: Gloria being number one driver and bird spotter, Pam a bird spotter and list keeper, Glenda catching the birds on her camera while I trace our route on the map and record facts about sightings for the team report.

Geraldine Ryan, Annual Count volunteer 25 years



Karak hits the road!

Community engagement is a vital part of spreading the word about our beautiful birds, and in providing the chance for the public to interact with the team and find out more about the recovery project. February and March were very busy hitting the road with Karak and taking part in several local festivals including Henley on Lake Wallace on February 14th, Heywood Wood Wine and Roses Festival on February 28th, and the South-East Field Days at Lucindale on the 20th and 21st of March. These days were very well supported by the public with a constant stream of foot traffic on all days. Thank you to everyone who dropped by and shared their insights, asked excellent questions, and joined up to play their part in the conservation of the South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo.

A big highlight when attending these events is the excitement of the students who have participated in the 'Kid's helping Cockies' program for the chance to stop by and share what they have learnt with the team and getting their photo taken with Karak.

The team is very grateful for the support of partner organisations in attending these events. We would like to thank Bindy Lees - West Wimmera Landcare facilitator, Samantha Rothe - Trees for Life, Vanessa Freebairn and Robbie Andrews - Limestone Coast Landcare Board and especially Evan Roberts - Recovery team member and volunteer, for teaming up to make these events a success

Finally, these festivals cannot take place without a tremendous amount of work by a dedicated team of volunteers, and we would like to extend our incredible gratitude to these committees for not only providing a space but also in giving the team a warm welcome. We would like to especially acknowledge the committees of Henley on Lake Wallace and Heywood Wood Wine and Roses festival for providing a site free of charge.

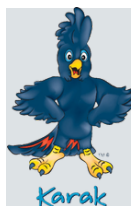


Trees for Life Paddock Tree project coordinator Samantha Rothe and Evan Roberts promoting South Australia's paddock tree project. Each year Evan volunteers countless hours to the recovery project through his involvement in and organisation of the South-East Field Days. Photo credit: Rachel Farran



Local Lancare facilitator for the West Wimmera, Bindy Lees joined the recovery team at Henley on Lake Wallace in Edenhope. Photo credit: West Wimmera Shire Council

St Malachy's school theme for the Henley on Lake Wallace parade was 'Where the Wild things are'. The school takes part in the Kid's Helping Cockies program and were very excited to meet Karak. Photo credit: Bindy Lees



Karak was the mascot for the 2006 Commonwealth Games. He was modelled on the South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo. Following the games the suit was donated to the recovery project.





Postcard to a Local: Native Species Art Exhibition

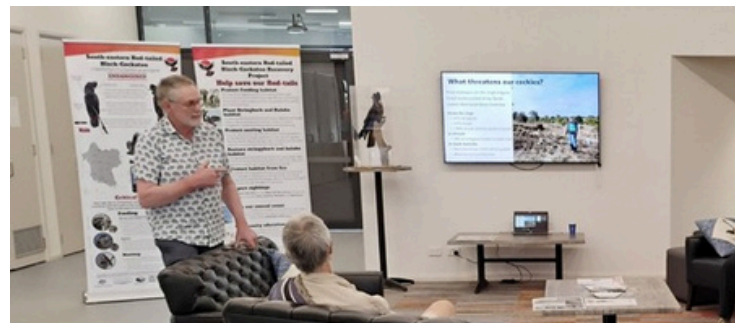
Edenhope Library hosted two special events in February this year celebrating the South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo as part of its Postcard to a Local: Native Species Art Exhibition.

Guest speaker Rachel Farran, Project Coordinator for the South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo Recovery Project spoke about the challenges facing this threatened local species. Rachel was joined by Wayne Caldow, who shared his experiences from the early days of the recovery program in the late 1990s.

The exhibition featured more than 130 colourful postcard-sized artworks displayed during February in the Community Centre Activity Area, each celebrating local flora and fauna. It attracted strong community interest and enthusiastic participation from artists of all ages.

Some highlights from participants:

- The postcard became more than just an image – it sparked curiosity, deepened connection, and celebrated the extraordinary richness of West Wimmera's flora and fauna. The greatest success of this project was inspiring people to truly notice and value the natural world right at their doorstep.



Wayne Caldow a well known Edenhope local and previous red-tail project officer talking about his experiences in the early days of red-tail research.

Photo credit: Melanie Y'Lang

- Viewing a diverse collection of artwork that clearly represents our community's passion for local flora and fauna.
- Seeing all the individual artworks and being able to read what people wrote.
- Brilliant presentations, very engaging.

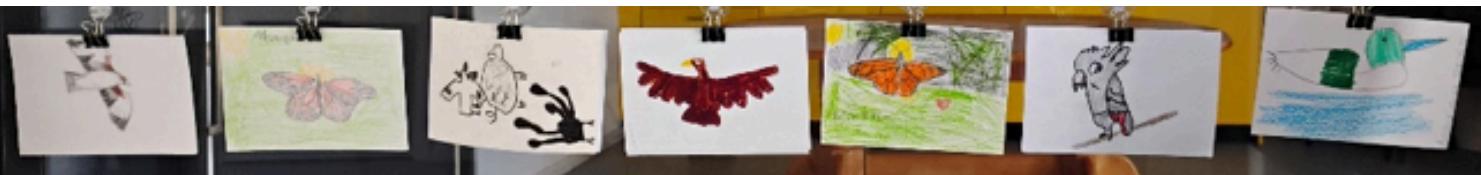
Thank you to everyone who contributed art, viewed the exhibition, and attended these events. We were delighted by the creativity and support from the local community.

The postcards were put on display at Horsham Library in March to coincide with [Deep Listening to Nature with Andrew Skeoch](#). Andrew Skeoch is an educator, author, and one of Australia's best-known nature sound recordists. His presentation explored how careful listening to birds, insects, and animals can reveal the health of ecosystems.



Postcards to a local exhibition.. Photo credit: Melanie Y'Lang

Melanie Y'Lang, Librarian Edenhope Library

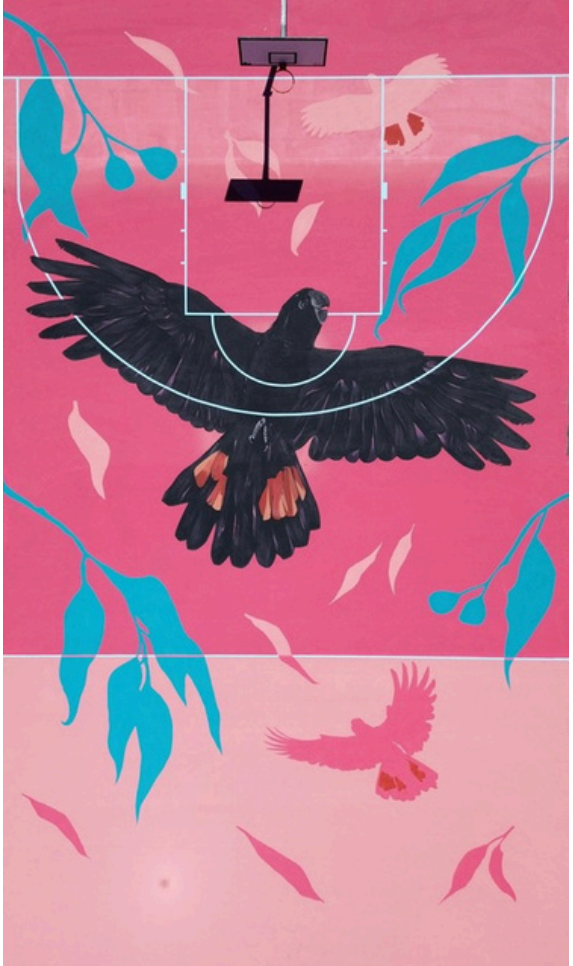


Celebrating Red-tails through local art and winning awards!

Naracoorte's Market Square Recreation Area half-court basketball mural —celebrating the endangered South-eastern Red-tailed Black Cockatoo —has been awarded Project of the Year at the 2026 Sport Group Asia Pacific Project Partner Awards in Macau. Created by Communities in Colour artists Travis Thompson and Jimmy Brooks with support from Naracoorte Lucindale Council's Community Art Fund and local After School Art Club participants, the vibrant mural has been recognised for transforming a sporting space into a powerful expression of culture, storytelling and community connection, while fostering shared creativity and environmental awareness.



Members of Naracoorte Lucindale Council's After School Art Club were involved with the project, adding the finishing touches to the mural. Photo credit: Communities in Colour



Upper Glenelg Landcare hosted a paint and sip event at Dunrobin Hall with funding from the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal. The workshop, hosted by artist Jacky Morris, was held on the Sunday following the count. Here are some artworks created by Glenda Wilson, Vanessa and Grace Freebairn.

Photo credit:
Gloria Freeman (left),
Vanessa Freebairn (right)



Contact: Rachel Farran, South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo Recovery Program Coordinator
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This project is funded by the Australian Government's Natural Heritage Trust and delivered by Glenelg Hopkins CMA, Limestone Coast Landscape Board and Wimmera CMA, all members of the Commonwealth Regional Delivery Partners panel.

