

Red-tail News

Issue 41 September 2015

WELCOME

Welcome to the 2015 Spring Edition of Red-tail News. Edition 41 of RTN brings to you a collection of news stories covering the results of the 2015 Annual Count and Flock Counts, a wrap up on the popular Kids helping Cockies Project, information on how you could receive up to \$500

cash for information on nest sites of the cockatoo, results from Australian Geographic's 'Threatened Black-Cockatoo' fundraiser appeal plus much more.

Bronwyn Perryman

HAVE YOU SEEN ANY RED-TAILS LATELY?

The Recovery Team is always keen to hear from anyone who sees Red-tails across the range in both the South East of South Australia and South West Victoria.

All credible sightings are accepted. Of particular interest are any reports of single adult males and/or any uncommon sightings, such as those either close to or beyond what we consider their normal range, or where the birds have not been sighted for some time.

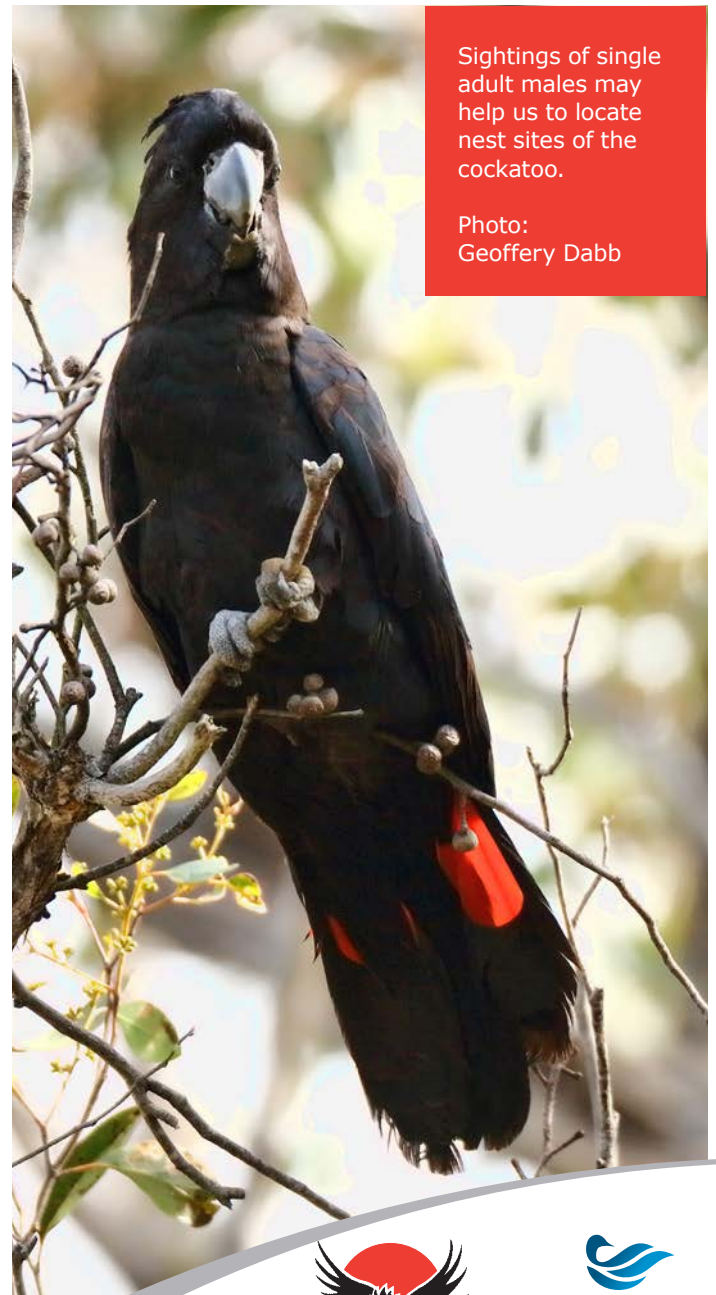
More recently there have been several sightings of birds outside their core range, with reports from Cavendish, Mount Charles and Wyperfeld National Park. The Recovery Team are particularly interested to hear from anyone who notices birds in these areas.

While it is often difficult to find Red-tails, it's easy to record a sighting. Simply phone 1800 262 062, email redtail@birdlife.org.au or report your sighting via the Red-tail website www.redtail.com.au.

When reporting a sighting please remember to include: date and time, place (CFS/CFA map reference is appreciated), how many birds, what they were doing (i.e feeding, drinking, flying), and your name and phone number/email.

Sightings of single adult males may help us to locate nest sites of the cockatoo.

Photo:
Geoffery Dabb



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KARAK-ING COCKY COUNT

More than 135 volunteers participating in the range-wide search for the endangered South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo (SERTBC) have helped to locate over 1500 birds in stringybark country across the South-east of South Australia and South-West Victoria.

The count, which was held back on Saturday 2 May, proved to be a big success with 38 sightings of birds and eight large flocks ranging in size between 75-349 individuals located.

In total 1545 birds were counted which is seventy seven more birds than our previous best tally of 1468 recorded back in 2012.

The result is particularly pleasing given the lower number of birds recorded in the two years previous. This confirms our suspicions about birds being missed in previous counts, rather than the population suffering a rapid decline.

Although the number of birds recorded is the best yet it should not be interpreted as a population increase. Just as last year's count was not interpreted as a decrease). The critically small population is believed to be still in decline based on the ongoing loss and deterioration of the species' key habitats.

This year the birds were again dispersed widely, with sightings from as far north as Mt Charles in South Australia to Rennick State Forest in the far south-west of Victoria.

By far the greatest concentrations (over 67%) of Red-tails were found in the southern part of the range, with large flocks found near Rennick, Comaum, Nangwarry, Digby and Roseneath State Forest. As in 2012, many of the larger flocks were recorded coming in to drink at farm troughs, making for easy counting.

The largest flock encountered this year, totalling a staggering 349 birds, was found coming in to drink on private property to the east of Rennick State Forest in the days following the count.

The most birds counted on the day (Saturday 2 May) went to the Lord Family, who counted a whopping 272 birds over the course of the day.

Over 70% of the birds found on the day were recorded in or adjacent to tracts of Brown Stringybark forest. An abundance of Red-tails in a particular area generally coincides with the fruiting patterns of the stringybark. Based on this knowledge, it would appear that the Brown Stringybark is carrying the most recent seed crop.

Several mid to large sized flocks were also encountered in the northern parts of the range. Of particular interest were the 100 birds feeding in Mt-Arapiles - Tooan State Park around 20kms south-west of Natimuk. Although the park is within the cockatoo's range the birds are not commonly recorded in this area.

Other areas in which Red-tails were recorded include Meereek State Forest, Yallakar State Forest, Clear Lake, Frances, Powers Creek, Penola West, Naracoorte Ranges and Lucindale.

Again, there was an absence of birds recorded around Casterton (where two years ago 233 birds were recorded) and around Lower Glenelg National Park. Both areas have, in more recent years, been affected by wild fire and planned burns.



Volunteers attending the Baileys Rocks BBQ and Campout.
Photo: Tim Burnard

The success of this year's count has been attributed to the large number of pre-count sightings and information received in the weeks leading up to the count. In particular, information with regard to drinking sites has enabled team members and volunteers to be strategically placed at watering points where birds have been recently seen drinking.

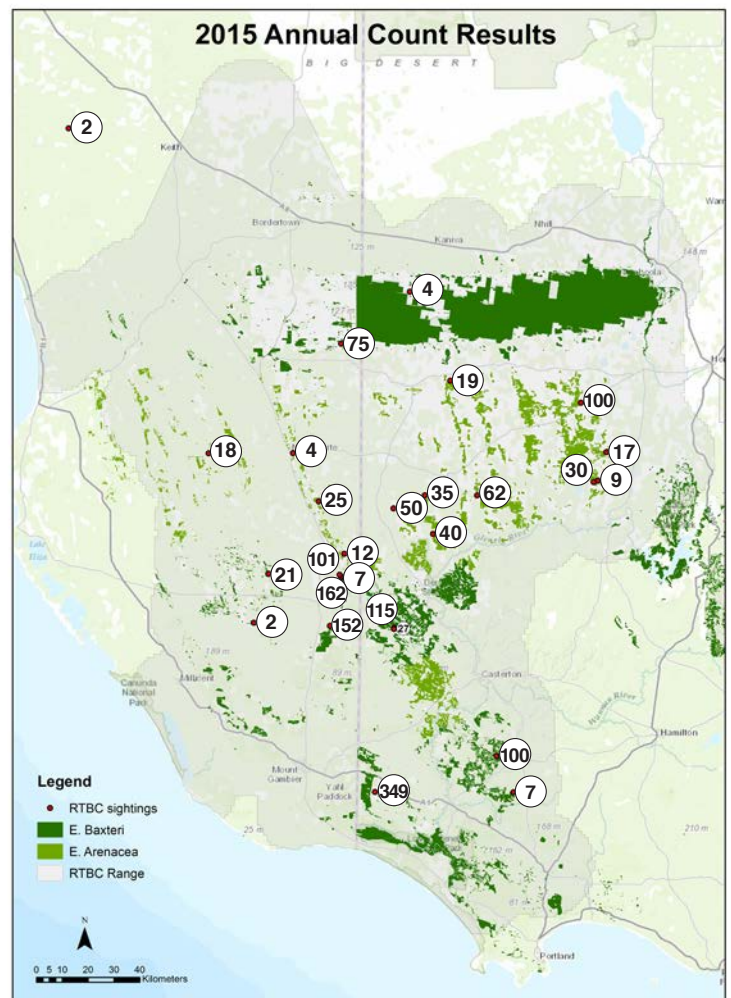
In addition, the weather conditions on the day were in general far more conducive to searching for Red-tails than last year.

There was again a wonderful turnout of volunteers comprising locals, farmers who chose to survey their own stringybark patches, and interstate participants who travelled from as far away as Adelaide and Melbourne to assist on the day.

The annual Bailey's Rock Dinner and Campout was again a success with around 25 volunteers attending the night. As usual there was a good amount of bragging and banter about who saw the most birds, plus some informative talks from Tim and Richard about Red-tails.

The Red-tail Recovery Team and BirdLife Australia would like to congratulate and express their sincere thanks to all the wonderful volunteer observers, including those who reported sightings in the lead up to the count. Without their incredible effort, this event would not be possible - so a big thanks to all.

Also a special thanks to Evan Roberts, Felicity Lord, Ros Bradey and Kerry Gilkes for their assistance with promoting the count and getting local landholders involved on the day and Tim Burnard for running the training session in Casterton and organising the campsite at Baileys Rocks.



Observations and counts of South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos recorded as part of 2015 annual count. Double counts excluded



Counts of flocks are almost always undertaken at watering points such as stock troughs.

Photo: Charlotte Davis

COUNTING FLOCKS

One of the most important reasons for conducting an annual search for Red-tails each year is to identify the location of large flocks across the range so staff can carry out annual flock counts.

Flock counts are undertaken in late autumn each year to gain an indication of breeding success in previous seasons. Because young Red-tails are indistinguishable in the field from two and three-year old birds and from females of any age, project staff 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.

Assuming a 50:50 ratio of males to females, an estimate of the number of young birds (1-3 years) in the population can be calculated. For example, if there are 50 male birds and 60 bar-tailed birds that means there is around 10 young birds (most species maintain a roughly 50:50 male/female ratio). The ratio in this example would be 45%.

The proportion of adult males in flocks during autumn varies from year to year, according to how many young birds have been produced in the preceding breeding seasons. More successful nesting means more young birds, thus a lower proportion of adult males.

This year, flock counts were completed during May with just under a third of the population being counted (487 birds). Counts of birds were undertaken on private land near Rennick, Nangwarry, Tullich and Comaum. The proportion of males found in flocks was again high, with 46% of birds counted in flocks found to be adult male. This suggests only 7% of individuals in flocks counted were made up of juveniles/sub-adults.

Analysis of flock count and food availability data by Maron & Smith (2012) and more recently by Potts (2015) have both shown that the proportion of adult males has increased with time, and that the most important predictor or factor affecting the proportion of males was the amount of stringybark fruit available three years prior to the count.

These results confirm our understanding that breeding success and population size is limited by food availability.

Reviewing the methodology

A recent review of SERTBC monitoring methods, commissioned by the DELWP, has highlighted the need to better refine the flock count methodology to ensure consistency in the approach taken to collect the data, and the need to determine if there is any observer bias that may influence the proportion of males detected in flocks.

The Recovery Team is in the process of trialling and comparing various methods (i.e. binoculars vs cameras vs scope) to determine the best approach to conduct these counts in the future. This includes repeat counts of flocks to evaluate observer performance.

A new survey protocol that clearly describes the manner in which flock counts are to be conducted will be developed as part of this process. The Recovery Team also intends to investigate other sources of error/bias such as the extent to which juveniles drink at troughs and whether there is any geographic variation in flock composition.

GALLERY SEEKS RED-TAIL ART EXHIBITS

The Red Tail Art Gallery in conjunction with the Kowree Farm Tree Group are seeking exhibits for a 'Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo' themed Art Exhibition.

The exhibition, which will be held at the Red Tail Gallery in Edenhope, aims to showcase a selection of art depicting the endangered South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo.

Organisers are currently seeking exhibits of any medium including, but not limited to, paintings, sculptures, photographs and textiles.

The exhibition will run from the 8 – 28 November 2015.

For more information or to request a submission form please contact Colin Kelly at the Gallery on 0438 899 863 or via email wwcas@yahoo.com.au.

The Red Tail Gallery is located at 50 Elizabeth Street, Edenhope. Opening hours are 11am – 3pm Wednesday to Sunday.

80 Year 3 Students from Tenison Woods College helped to plant over 500 seedlings at Wandilo Pasture Strip as part of the school tree planting day.

Photo: Tina Opperman.



LITTLE GREEN THUMBS PLANTING TREES FOR COCKIES

Since 2012, BirdLife Australia has assisted Tenison Woods College to establish a stringybark growing program similar to those schools participating in the popular Kids helping Cockies project.

The school with the help of a SA Community NRM Grant has established a functional nursery capable of growing hundreds of stringybark seedlings for Red-tail revegetation projects. Up to 80 Year 3 students from three classes have been involved each year to collect seed and germinate stringybark seedlings.

Although the school has experienced some difficulties along the way this year saw the first group of students head out and plant stringybarks for Red-tails. On the 26 June around 80 students, 3 teachers and 8 volunteers took part in a school tree planting day at Forestry SA's Wandilo Pasture Strip.

The planting day was hugely successful with students planting over 500 seedlings (a mixture of Brown stringybark and various understorey species including Banksia, Acacia, melaleuca, Leptospermum etc) over the course of the day.

The enthusiasm and feedback from students, teachers and volunteers helping on the day was hugely encouraging. It was a day thoroughly enjoyed by all, particularly the Karinie students, who shared their own experiences and memories of helping to cultivate food on their own families' small farming plot back in Thailand. Being able to share their knowledge and experience of this with the other students was very important to them.

Participation in the day enabled students to gain some valuable lessons in tree planting and a greater appreciation for biodiversity and their natural surroundings – skills which they will keep with them forever.

The project has provided a great hands-on conservation experience for students enabling them to be directly involved in helping to increase the area of stringybark habitat and provide a future food source for the cockatoo. Not only does this provide benefits for Red-tails, but for many other native woodland bird and mammal species that occupy these habitats.



Left: Moo Bya from Tenison Woods College helping to plant a brighter future for our Red-tails.

Right: Annabelle Solomons from Tenison Woods College helps to secure the guard and stake of a newly planted stringybark seedling.

Photo: Tina Opperman

KIDS CONTINUING TO HELP COCKIES

The 'Kids Helping Cockies' project was established in 2012 with the aim of educating and engaging local schools in habitat propagation and restoration activities for the endangered South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo.

Funded through the SA NRM Community Grants Program, the project has involved in-class presentations (about Red-tails) to over 2,160 students from 28 schools, and the establishment of six school nurseries to grow and plant out stringybark seedlings for habitat revegetation projects for the cockatoo.

School nursery programs have been established at Naracoorte South Primary School, Naracoorte Primary School, Glenburnie Primary School, Lucindale Area School, Nangwarry Primary School and Melaleuca Park Primary School. A seventh school, St Anthony's College, has recently committed to the nursery program.

Schools participating in the 'Kids helping Cockies' nursery program have been supported by staff to:

1. Prepare grant applications for funding nursery development;
2. Establish/set-up nurseries for growing stringybarks which include propagation tables, watering systems, tubes, trays and potting mix;
3. Collect and propagate stringybark seed; and
4. Care for and plant out grown seedlings/tube-stock.

Project staff have continued to provide guidance and training to teachers on the propagation, care and maintenance of seedlings and revegetation techniques. It has been a learning journey along the way with two of the six schools successfully working through the entire process from collecting seeds to planting out grown seedlings. The remaining schools, although able to germinate seedlings, experienced difficulties in getting seedlings to a suitable height to plant out. The main challenges for the schools were water quality/quantity and caring for seedlings over holiday periods. The schools have looked at how they can address these issues for future plantings.

The nursery schools have been offered the opportunity to continue with their nursery programs and grow seedlings for the next planting season and beyond. Project staff will continue to encourage and support schools to participate and children will get the opportunity to be involved in keeping our iconic bird in the landscape.

Kerry Gilkes



Healthy stringybark seedlings grown by Glenburnie Primary School Children as part of the Kids helping Cockies Project.

Photo: Kerry Gilkes.

MAINTAINING NESTS



Woodchips are added to the inside of nest boxes as part of routine maintenance checks. Photo: Tim Burnard

Many years ago the Victorian state government erected about 50 artificial nest boxes (PVC and natural hollows from fallen trees) at a series of sites around Edenhope. It was a massive job! Natural hollows even when cut in 1 m lengths weigh a lot and you need some big equipment to get them up in a tree or on a pole.

Many of these nest boxes have been used in the past,

some quite regularly. The trouble is that these nest boxes are exposed to the elements and do need some maintenance. Normally this is just a case of topping up wood chips in the base of the nest. Sometimes it requires more substantial work to refit the base or strengthen the mount.

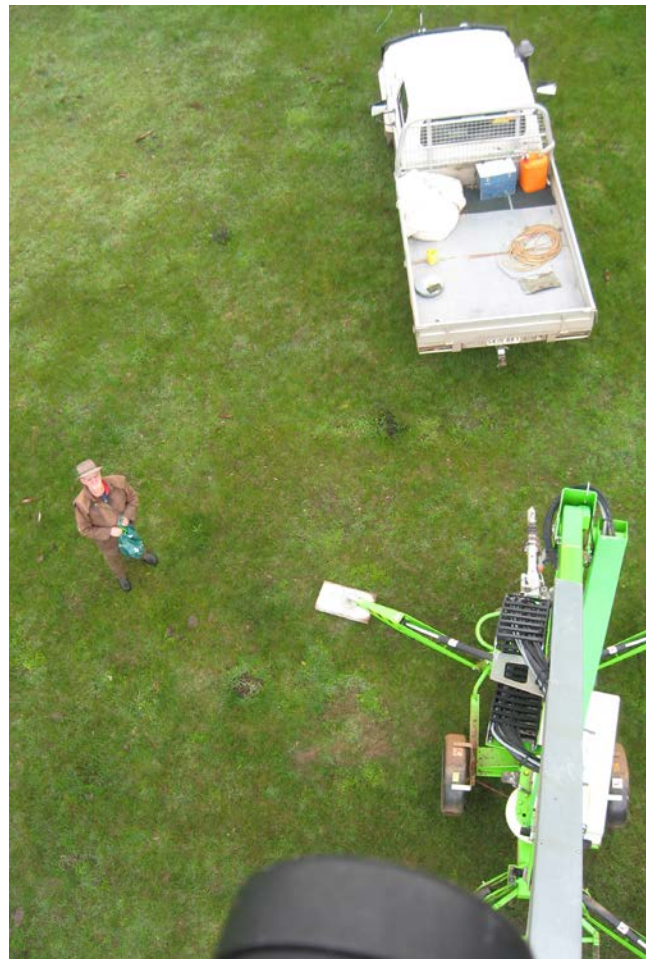
Most importantly, we check the internal ladders on the PVC boxes. Red-tails can easily get a grip on the inside of a red gum hollow, but cannot perch on a slippery PVC side. So we put metal ladders inside the box and then check them at regular intervals.

As always, I was accompanied by trusty nest maintenance guy / farmer / Red-tail lover, Evan Roberts. Evan towed the cherry picker around six sites in the Edenhope area and we looked into about 40 nest boxes.

A slight difference this year was to take swabs for analysis by the Melbourne Uni team. It will be fascinating to see the results from this.

So that's it. The nests are good to go for another two years!

Tim Burnard



A cocky's eye view. Evan Roberts assists Tim Burnard with routine nest box maintenance. Photo: Tim Burnard

RED-TAILED BLACK-COCKATOO HEALTH SURVEY

With approximately 1500 individuals left in the wild, it is important to understand the factors which play a role in the survivability and reproductive success of Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos.

Presently, little is known about what diseases circulate in the population and what effect these may have on the population's status. Traditional disease monitoring is usually performed by obtaining samples from individuals, however in valuable small wild populations, this can be difficult and any trapping and handling of birds comes at a risk to those individuals.

Researchers at the University of Melbourne Faculty of Veterinary and Agricultural Sciences are working with the Recovery Team to trial a method of surveying for disease by testing swabs obtained from nest sites used by Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos.

Swabs were collected during the 2015 routine maintenance of artificial nest sites. These swabs are currently being processed to look for the DNA of disease causing agents, in particular Beak and Feather Disease Circovirus which is known to cause disease in other wild cockatoo species in Victoria.

Can you help?

The investigation is interested in reports from the community about any dead parrots, lorikeets and cockatoos or sightings of wild cockatoos with beak or feather abnormalities to understand the distribution of beak and feather disease and other diseases.

If you find a recently dead parrot/cockatoo or sight sick birds, please note the location and contact Dr Pam Whiteley on

0400 119 301, (email: pamw@unimelb.edu.au) or Dr Anthony Chamings on (03) 9731 2012, (email: chamings@unimelb.edu.au).

If you do pick up a dead bird, for your own health please wear gloves or use a plastic bag as a glove to avoid directly handling the carcass. Wrap the carcass in a secure plastic bag, double bag and chill it with a bag of ice, and promptly contact Pam or Anthony.

Dr Anthony Chamings



A Sulphur Crested Cockatoo suffering from Beak and Feather Disease. Photo: Pam Whiteley



A female South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo at the entrance of a nest hollow. Photo: Bob McPherson

INCENTIVES FOR NESTS

Since July 2011, the Recovery Team and BirdLife Australia have been working with the community to locate new nest sites of the cockatoo across the range in the South East of South Australia and South West Victoria as part of the Nest Incentive Scheme.

Nests are hard to find, yet we want to know where they are to try and improve their protection, and to collar them against brush-tailed possums, which can destroy Red-tail nests.

The program, which offers a \$500 reward to landholders and members of the public for the discovery of new nest sites, has had great success with a total of 14 new nests found since 2011. New nests have been found near Benayeo, Casterton, Powers Creek, Edenhope, Dry Creek and Naracoorte.

An incentive of \$100 will also be offered for information on the use of existing nest sites by Red-tails.

Red-tails require large hollows for nesting, which naturally occur in very old, large eucalypts such as River Red Gums. Nests can be in dead or live trees and are more likely to occur in areas where there is stringybark within a 3 km radius. Although Red-tails have been found to nest year round, most breeding activity occurs over spring and summer.

There are a number of conditions required when applying for the scheme, with incentive payments only made once the sighting has been confirmed by the Project Team. Nests reported on private land can only be claimed by the landholder. Those found on public land can be claimed by any member of the public, however some exceptions do apply.

While the Recovery Team encourages members of the public to search for nests on freely accessible public land, it emphasises care must be taken not to trespass on private land while searching.

While reporting of all Red-tail nesting activity is encouraged, interference or physical disturbance to nest trees is prohibited.

All observations should be done from a safe distance (greater than 100m from nest site). Disturbed birds may abandon their nest, which will result in no payment being awarded.

If you observe nesting behaviour or think you know of a Red-tail nest that is unknown to the Recovery Team please visit our website www.redtail.com.au and follow the link to the Nest Incentive Scheme Page. This is where you will find out more about the project, nesting behaviour of Red-tails and our guidelines for payment.

Alternatively you can contact the Project Coordinator on 1800 262 062 or by email redtail@birdlife.org.au.

ACKNOWLEDGING THE SUPPORT OF ZOOS SA

Since January 2011 the Recovery Team and BirdLife Australia have been working in partnership with Zoos SA (Royal Zoological Society of South Australia) to manage and improve habitat conditions and build community interest and support for the conservation and recovery of the South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo (SERTBC).

Over the last four and half years, Zoos SA have contributed just over \$66,000 in funding towards the Recovery Project. This has enabled us to carry out the following activities including:

- the location, protection and maintenance of nest sites;
- population and habitat monitoring – including the annual range-wide count, flock counts and long-term phenology study;
- maintenance of the SERTBC website and 1800 number for sighting reports;
- development and sharing of information with the community, including the delivery of educational presentations to community and school groups, attendance at regional field day events, and preparation and distribution of resource materials and articles about conservation activities undertaken as part of the project; and
- supporting volunteer involvement in recovery activities for the cockatoo.

Zoos SA is a highly valued supporter of the Recovery Program and has continued to be a leader in the delivery of high priority on-ground restoration works for the cockatoo in South Australia. For example, the Zoo's highly successful 'Cockies helping Cockies' project has seen more than 500 hectares of Desert stringybark habitat protected/restored and over 80 landholders engaged in this process. Their past work demonstrates the Zoo's capacity to engage and work well with landholders and rural communities and provide value for money to deliver outstanding on-ground results for the cockatoo.

The Zoos SA component of the Recovery Project has now come to a close; however the organisation was successful in securing more funds to continue delivery of the highly successful 'Cockies helping Cockies' project until June 2017.

On behalf of the SERTBC Recovery Team and BirdLife Australia I would like to express my sincere thanks to Zoos SA for their fantastic contribution and valuable participation in the project over the last four and half years.

For more information on Zoos SA and how to get involved please visit their website at <http://www.zoossa.com.au/>.



AUSTRALIAN GEOGRAPHIC RAISES CASH FOR COCKIES



Funds raised will go towards improving habitat conditions for Red-tails.

Photo: Mike Sverns

Earlier this year, the Australian Geographic Society ran a two month, nation-wide appeal in conjunction with Australian Geographic Retail stores for Australia's 'Threatened Black-Cockatoos'.

One of the cockatoos to benefit was our very own South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo, with the campaign raising just over \$12,000 for recovery efforts for this species.

The Red-tail Recovery Team and BirdLife Australia are thrilled with the result and would like to sincerely thank the Australian Geographic Society for all their hard work and generosity in helping to raise such a substantial amount of cash for these wonderful cockies.

The funds will be used to support recovery activities including those that monitor the population, improve habitat conditions, minimise key threats and build community capacity in recovery efforts.

The Australian Geographic Society is a not-for profit organisation dedicated to supporting scientific research, conserving the environment, encouraging the spirit of discovery and spreading the knowledge of Australia to Australians and the world.

For more information about the Australian Geographic Society and other upcoming appeals please visit their website at <http://www.australiangeographic.com.au/society>.

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Help us create positive outcomes for birds and their habitats

Bronwyn Perryman

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

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