

Red-tail News

Issue 45 December 2017



Did you know the female South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo is the most brightly coloured of all sub-species of RTBC across Australia?

Photo: David Adam

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WELCOME TO EDITION 45 OUR CHRISTMAS EDITION OF RED-TAIL NEWS.

I'd like to start by saying a big thank you to Kerry Gilkes for stepping into the role of Project Coordinator while I was on maternity leave. Kerry did an amazing job in my absence working extremely hard to tick off all the big ticket items including her first Annual Count – which is no mean feat by any stretch!

Kerry can still be contacted through her current role as Project Facilitator for the highly successful 'Cockies helping Cockies' project. Anyone wishing to undertake habitat protection and restoration work for Red-tails in SA is encouraged to contact Kerry at any time.

I'd also like to welcome Charlie Sherwin to the wonderful world of Red-tails. Charlie is the new Woodland Bird Conservation Campaigner with BirdLife Australia and brings with him a wealth of knowledge and expertise in campaigning, strategic communications and in influencing policy and on-ground outcomes. Charlie will be leading BirdLife's advocacy work around Red-tails and Swift parrots. Please join me in welcoming Charlie to the Team.

In this edition of Red-tail News we'll learn more about Charlie and his passion for advocating policy change, look back on the results of the annual count and flock counts, be introduced to some new initiatives for Red-tails and immerse ourselves in some fabulous contemporary bird artwork thanks to Eggpicnic.

At this time each year we also encourage the community to report nesting cockatoos so we can locate and protect new nest sites, and monitor the outcomes of nests through Dani's bioacoustic project. To ensure we find a good subset of nests to monitor we are urging anyone who sees Red-tails to report their observations. Knowing where birds are in the landscape helps us to target our nest searches. Reporting a sighting is easy simply phone 1800 262 062, email redtail@birdlife.org.au or head to our website at www.redtail.com.au.

Lastly, a big thank you to all our wonderful volunteers who have helped out with Red-tail activities during the year. Your contribution and efforts are highly valued.

We hope you enjoy reading our selection of stories and wish you all a wonderful Christmas and a very happy and prosperous New Year.

Thanks, Bronwyn



'COCKIES HARD TO FIND' - ANNUAL COUNT RESULTS 2017



A male Red-tail photographed on count day by volunteer counter Adam Branford. Photo: Adam Branford

This year 84 groups totalling 172 volunteers took part in the annual count for the endangered South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo across the range on Saturday 6 May.

Although 154 sites were searched, the birds proved elusive. The result? 810 Red-tails counted across south-western Victoria and the South East of South Australia.

With flocks widely dispersed and considerably smaller than last year, the windy conditions made finding the birds even more difficult.

The occurrence of smaller flocks this year may also be partly to blame for the fewer Red-tails counted.

Red-tails are often very difficult to find at the best of times, especially given their rarity and widespread distribution, from Natimuk and Keith south to Nelson and Mount Gambier.

Although the number of cockies counted this year is lower than last year, it is unlikely that the population has suffered a significant decline over the last 12 months. It is more likely the birds were simply missed on the day.

This year Red-tails were seen near Casterton, Goroke, Edenhope, Harrow, Dergholm, Nelson, Lucindale, Frances, Coonawarra, Nangwarry, Heywood, Wattle Range, Naracoorte and Tarpeena. Only one flock of more than 100 birds was recorded, east of Edenhope.

Information gathered during the annual count is used to determine patterns of habitat use, a minimum number of birds and, most importantly, the locations of large flocks.

Flock counts are carried out in the weeks following the annual count as they provide the best indication of breeding success. These subsequent counts are proving difficult as the Recovery Team relies on finding the large flocks to count as they come in to drink in the evening, but with water still lying across the landscape, finding the birds' drinking spots is proving quite a challenge.

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

Volunteer effort was again outstanding, with volunteers spending over 340 hours scouring more than 3,500 km of stringybark forest in search of Red-tails.

The annual Baileys Rocks Campout was again a big success, with more than 30 cocky counters gathering to catch up on who saw how many cockies where.

RTBC Annual Count App.

The CyberTracker RTBC Annual Count App was again trialled by 9 people to improve data handling and accuracy. It again received mixed reviews, but was found to be very useful for detailing the exact route taken on the day. The Recovery Team will be looking to take on board people's feedback and suggested improvements in readiness for next year's count.

Acknowledgements

On behalf of the Red-tail Recovery Team and BirdLife Australia I would like to express my sincere thanks to all the volunteers, including all those who reported sightings of Red-tails in the lead up the count, for supporting this annual event. Without volunteer support this event would not be possible.

A special thanks to Evan Roberts for his assistance with promoting the count and getting local landholders involved on the day, Bronwyn Perryman for her support and knowledge and Tim Burnard for running the training session in Casterton and organising the campsite at Baileys Rocks.

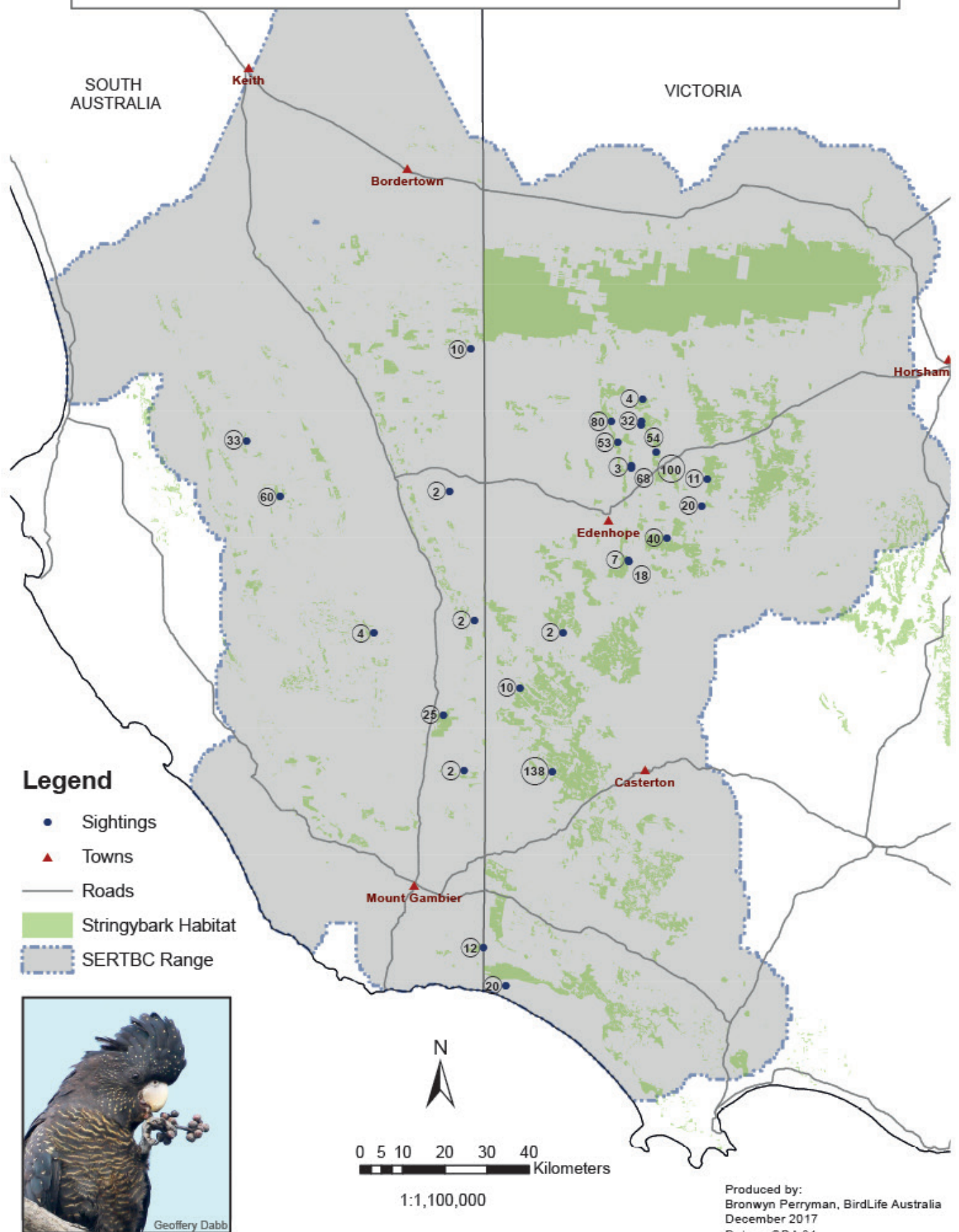
Kerry Gilkes



Volunteers attending the 2017 Baileys Rocks Campout after a long day counting cockies.

Photo: Tim Burnard

South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo Sightings 2017 Annual Count



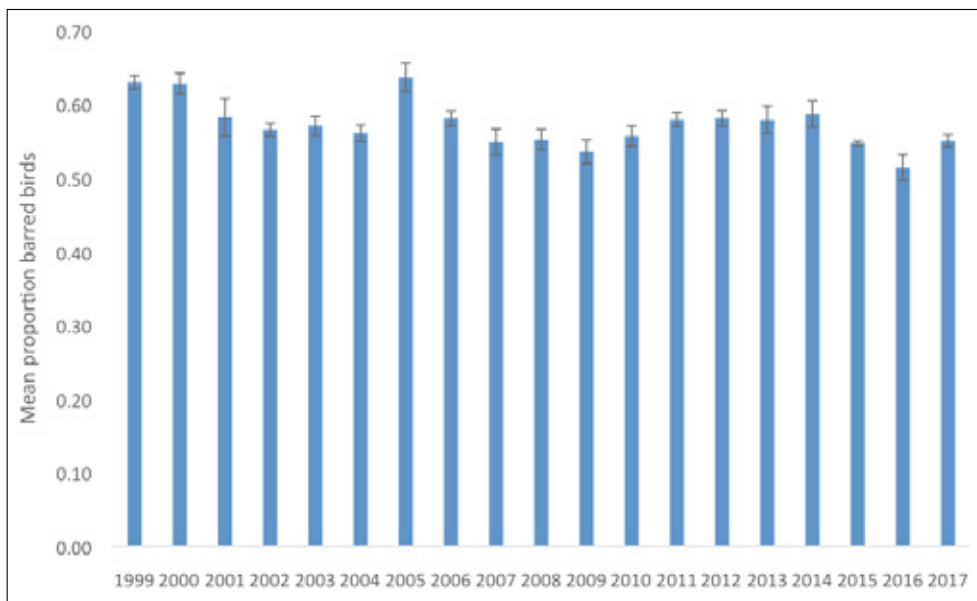
Observations of South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos counted as part of the 2017 Annual Count.

FLOCK COUNT REPORT

"Flock counts" are conducted in autumn each year to gain an indication of breeding success in previous years. Young Red-tails are for all practical purposes indistinguishable in flocks of Red-tails from one, two and three-year old birds and from females of any age, so we count the number of adult males in each flock. All other Red-tails are spotted and barred, with barred tail feathers. These are collectively called 'barred birds'. More successful nesting in previous years should mean more barred birds in flocks.

Previously we have reported these results as proportion of adult males. Here we are reporting on the proportion of barred birds. We think this is a more intuitive way to communicate these results: more barred birds, the better!

This year we counted six flocks totalling 633 birds. Flocks this year had a higher proportion of barred birds (55%) than last year (51%), good news, suggesting that there had been some successful nesting last year. The average since 1999, 19 years of counts, is 58% barred birds.

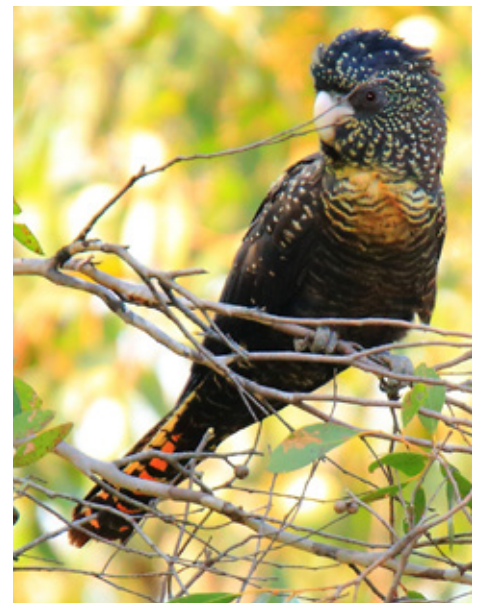


Mean proportion of barred birds in flocks since 1999.

Our annual stringybark monitoring indicated that availability of new seed crops had increased substantially between 2015 (also at a record low) and 2016, and that birds breeding in 2016 would have access to some new seed crops as a result. This year's results provide further evidence for the role of food (new seed crops of stringybark) in regulating population size through influencing breeding success.

It is encouraging to see the positive monitoring results and to have a plausible explanation for that in our stringybark food availability data. But note that the proportion of barred birds this year was still one of the lowest recorded. Our 2017 stringybark monitoring suggests that breeding success should be higher in 2017 and consequently flock ratios in 2018 should show that. We'll just have to wait and see.

Tim Burnard and Richard Hill



A brightly coloured female or 'barred' bird displaying a striking yellow throat patch or 'broach'. Photo: Rick Dawson



Counts of barred/non-barred birds are undertaken at drinking sites like this stock trough near Casterton.

Photo: Rick Dawson

WELCOME CHARLIE SHERWIN



Charlie Sherwin

Speaking up for woodland wildlife is an urgent necessity and a great privilege says Charlie Sherwin, who is helping us out for a few months as an advocate for Red-tails.

"We know how hard the community work for cockies, so we're making sure our governments back this with good policies and proper funding for the species' recovery. While the community and government ground staff are slogging their guts out for this bird, governments themselves are failing to deliver on their promises" says Charlie.

His campaign work has focussed on improving the Victorian Government's protection of cocky habitat. "We know you can protect people from wildfire without ruining the cockies' food resources. We know you can keep people safe without knocking down hundreds and hundreds of supposedly "unsafe" trees. It's time Victoria caught up with their own Action Statement for this species".

A background of working in both government and non-government environmental organisations gives Charlie quick insight into some of the policy contradiction in cocky conservation. "We can't have schoolkids planting trees while governments knock them down, and it's silly to say we're reducing harm from wildfire when we're scorching a species to extinction to do it".

SE Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos speak to all of us with their stunning beauty and wild calls. We're adding our voices to theirs, calling on our governments to really deliver on their conservation responsibilities.

REWARDS FOR NESTS CONTINUE

The South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo Recovery Team and BirdLife Australia are calling on landholders and members of the public to report all sightings and nest activity of the endangered South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo.

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

The scheme, which offers \$500 for all 'new' nests reported to the Team and \$100 for information on the re-use of existing nests, will again be offered thanks to the Nature Foundation SA and funding from the 'SERTBC Recovery Project', which is supported by the Australian Government, South East Natural Resources, Wimmera Catchment Management Authority, Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority through funding from the Australian Governments National Landcare Programme and BirdLife Australia.

Over the last six years, the nest incentive project has proved to be a great success with a total of 23 new nests found across 11 sites.

Last year a record of nine new nests were found near Casterton and Edenhope thanks to the reports from local landholders and the work of Richard Hill and PhD student Daniella Teixeira.

Daniella is currently trialling new methods to monitor Red-tail breeding using bioacoustic technology. This involves comparing the calling behaviour we can hear and record at active nests with the behaviours skilled students and volunteers can observe at the same nest.

The aim is to explore whether specific vocalisations or calls, and certain behaviours can indicate nesting activity and fledging of chicks. The more nests found, the more the Team will learn about nest success and failure, which is critical given many years of poor breeding success.

Red-tails nest in large hollows (15-50cm), which most often occur in very old, large eucalypts such as River Red Gums. Nest hollows can be in dead or live trees and are more likely to be close to the cockatoo's stringybark feeding habitat.

Because Red-tails are highly nomadic, moving about their 18,000 km² range following their stringybark food source and nesting nearby, it is quite uncommon for pairs to use the same nest each year. This makes finding nests quite a challenge.

Furthermore, a large number of nests are located on private-land, which without the support of the landholder simply remain undetected to the Team.

To help us locate new nests, we are asking anyone who sees Red-tails or observes nesting behaviour to report their findings to the Project Coordinator by calling 1800 262 062 or via email redtail@birdlife.org.au.

There are a number of conditions required when applying for incentive payments, which are only issued once the sighting has been confirmed by the Project Team.

Some landholders are understandably protective of their nests and would rather not have people coming onto their properties for fear of disturbing the nest. The Team respects this and would be happy to discuss how they can help by providing information, but remain anonymous. There are a number of local landholders on the Team who would be happy to talk to you about this.

Guidelines for the nest incentive scheme and information on Red-tail nesting behaviour can be found by visiting the website.



A female and chick at the entrance of a nest hollow near Casterton.

Photo: Bob McPherson

KIDS HELPING COCKIES HELPING COCKIES

A Kowree Farm Tree Group (KFTG) project funded by the Australian Government's Threatened Species Recovery Fund, (running 2017/18).

Having read this far you are probably already saying "Hang on, hang on, isn't this a very successful project already being run in the Southeast of SA by Kerry Gilkes, Bronwyn and Vicki-Jo?". Um, well, yes, it is, but their work there has been so successful that we are muscling in on their franchise, plagiarising their, well, everything, but doing it on the Victorian side of the dotted line.

Pinching their idea because it is a good one does put some pressure on KFTG to do it well. The KFTG has been working with four local schools for the past two years. Propagation facilities were set up as part of the Victorian Government's Threatened Species Protection Initiative in late 2015. Seedlings were established and grown, but the land-owning cockies who were supposed to be helping the feathered cockies proved to be elusive.

KFTG recently won a grant from the Australian Government to continue this program. This time KFTG will repeat its earlier activities. And a project officer will be employed to recruit willing farmers and support their participation in this project. And this project will bring in several more schools. And it will extend further south to include the Casterton area.

Another difference is that the bulk of the trees grown will be planted as widely spaced individually guarded paddock trees. The rationale for this approach is that stringybarks in paddocks produce up to 26 times the seed that they produce in a forest. Another reason to try this approach is that there is a negligible commitment of land required by the farmers involved; that may be an easier concept to sell.

We know this approach will create a whole new set of problems. Can Kowree Farm Tree Group manage them? Stay tuned.

*Andrew Bradey,
President, Kowree Farm Tree Group*

BIODIVERSITY HUBS PROJECT – THREATENED SPECIES HABITAT RESTORATION IN THE WILKIN PRIORITY LANDSCAPE

A project focussing on threatened species habitat restoration in the Wilkin priority landscape of southwest Victoria is one of 26 projects recently funded as part of the Victorian State Government's Regional Biodiversity Hubs program.

This project is a partnership between Nature Glenelg Trust, Glenelg Hopkins CMA, Birdlife Australia, SE Red-tailed Black Cockatoo Recovery Team, Greening Australia, Parks Victoria and DEWLP and aims to undertake strategic on-ground works to protect and restore a matrix of woodland and wetland habitats for a suite of threatened species in the Wilkin priority landscape.

A primary objective of the project is to improve the extent and condition of brown stringybark woodland, which is regionally significant for South East Red-tailed Black Cockatoos. Specifically, this will be achieved by treatment of 300 Ha of woodland area for *Pinus radiata* and *Acacia longifolia*.

The SE Red-tailed Black Cockatoo Recovery Team will undertake subsequent assessments of the ecological health of the stringybark woodland to evaluate the success of weed control work and any infill revegetation.

An additional component of the project is the hydrological restoration of 300 Ha of wetland habitat, within the priority landscape.

The project commenced in June 2017 and runs until April 2020, so keep an eye out for updates.

*Lachie Farrington
Nature Glenelg Trust*



Example of pine wildling infestation and treatment in woodlands within the priority landscape area. Photo: Nature Glenelg Trust

MAINTAINING NESTS

Many years ago the Recovery Team installed about 30 artificial nest boxes on poles and in trees. They used PVC boxes as well as natural hollows gathered from fallen trees. It was a massive job, especially the natural hollows. Natural hollows, even when cut to a length of one metre, weigh about 100kgs 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 the artificial 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 get purchase on a slippery PVC side. So we put metal ladders inside the box and then check them at regular intervals; every two years if possible. I say "if possible" because we need to check nest boxes when they are least likely to be used, and that is in winter. This year though, the paddocks were so wet in the Edenhope area (where all poles are sited) that we couldn't get our cherry picker to many of our nest boxes. Great news for the local farmers...not so good for us!

For many years now Evan Roberts has helped in this work, volunteering time and vehicle to tow the cherry picker around six sites in the Edenhope area and ensure that I don't make any mistakes. Evan is one of our most dedicated volunteers, helping with field days, flock counts, nest maintenance and as a member of the Recovery Team. Thanks again Evan, I couldn't do this work without your help (and guidance!).

Tim Burnard

Tim inspecting an artificial nest (a recycled natural hollow on a pole as part of nest maintenance work.

Photo: Evan Roberts.



CASH FOR COCKIES & COCKIES

Red-tails are set to benefit from a joint partnership between the Australian Government, Natural Resources South East, BirdLife Australia and their donors, Zoos SA and the SERTBC Recovery Team to extend recovery efforts for the cockatoo across its range in the South East of SA and South-west Victoria.

Thanks to the generous support of the Australian Government, Natural Resources South East and BirdLife Australia donors - Ray & Joyce Uebergang Foundation and the Madden Sainsbury Foundation, BirdLife Australia and the Recovery Team have been able to leverage \$110K for the cockatoo and its recovery.

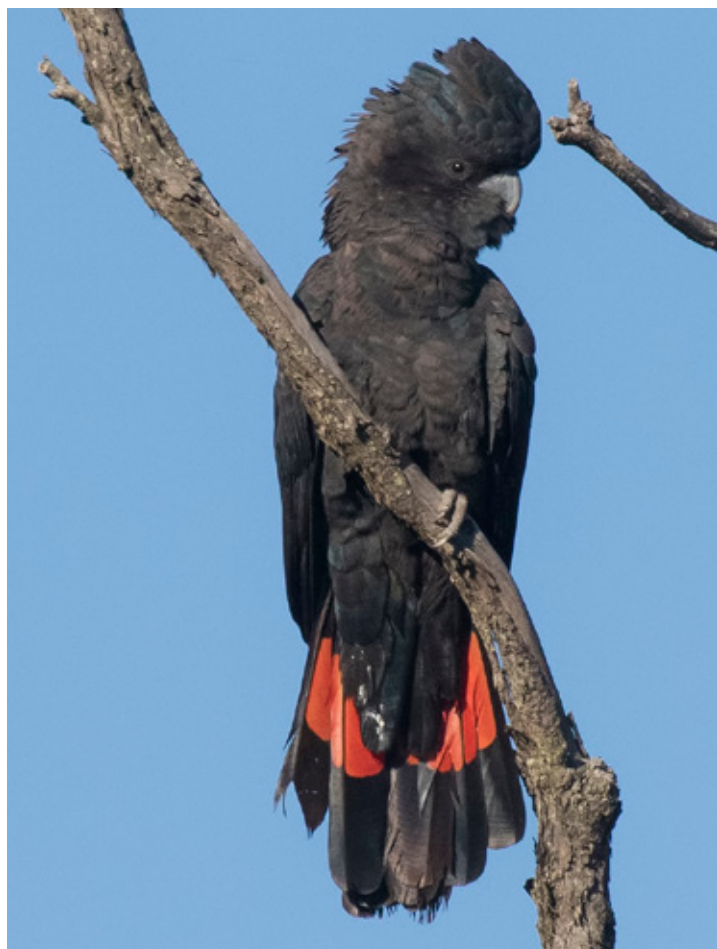
A large percentage of the funds raised will go towards extending the highly successful 'Cookies helping Cockies' project for a further 12 months.

The 'Cookies helping cockies' started in 2009 and has proved to be a huge success, with over 80 landholders involved in helping to protect and restore critical stringybark habitat of the cockatoo across the Lucindale-Naracoorte Range.

Since its establishment a total of 178 ha of habitat have been revegetated and 342 Ha of remnant habitat protected. A further year's investment will see an additional 50 hectares of habitat protected/enhanced and six additional landholders engaged.

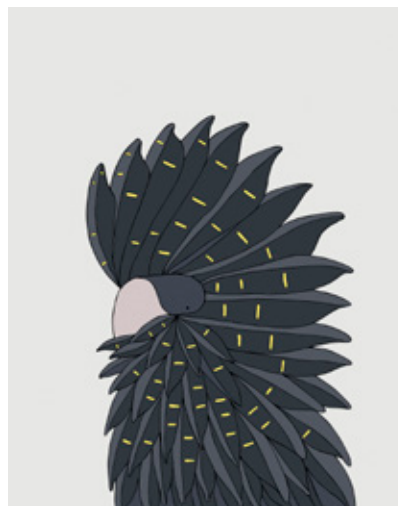
Furthermore, the project will support existing core recovery activities to monitor the population, protect and monitor nests, engage and support landholders and schools to protect and/or replant habitat, engage volunteers in recovery activities, raise awareness of the needs and key threats of the cockatoo, and improve policies to better protect critical habitat from clearance and fire.

For more information on how to become involved in helping to protect and restore habitats or monitor the population please contact the Project Coordinator on 1800 262 062.



The joint partnership project will go a long way towards protecting and creating more feed trees for Red-tails, like this male photographed by Luke Leddy near Bangham. Photo: Luke Leddy

EGGPICNIC – HELPING TO SAVE SPECIES THROUGH ART



Eggpicnic's stunning illustration of the Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo.

Eggpicnic is a design studio set up by two Sydney based artists who create fine art bird and animal prints and toys. Their artwork features our very own Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo.

A small percentage of the profit made from sales of this print goes to support the work done by BirdLife Australia. Co-founder, Camila De Gregorio talks more about Eggpicnic and their love for birds.

Eggpicnic was born from our mutual interest and love for the natural

world. As designers, we decided to merge our abilities in graphic and industrial design to communicate issues we believed needed to be urgently addressed in regards to our relationship with our planet. We began fusing design and conservation to talk about our unique fellow species in order to inspire change in people's hearts and minds. It became our mission to tell their stories through our work. If you can reach people you can change and empower them. We aim to bring animals into people's homes, tell their stories and also actively work with our NGO partners to support their conservation programs.

Since moving to Sydney I was blown away by its wildlife but especially by the birdlife. While we started working with birds as our subjects we began birding and joined Birding NSW as we wanted to experience firsthand what was happening. We volunteer in Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) surveys and bring this information back to our audience. Working with scientists has allowed us to establish multidisciplinary partnerships, where together we are able to create a bridge between science and citizens.

Cockatoos have become a part of the landscape and a part of our daily lives. The RTBC was the first black cockatoo I ever drew, not only because of their evident beauty but because I couldn't comprehend how we had let the species reach such low numbers. This was the first bird that opened my eyes to the challenges our wildlife face and allowed me to understand the importance of creating a society to match the scenery. This is a great time to take part in this change, we can make this happen. We need people to understand it's worth doing.

Camila De Gregorio

POPULAR RED-TAIL BOOK SHORTLISTED

You may recall in our previous edition hearing all about a fabulous new children's book about Red-tails by Emma Homes.

'Red-Tail Recovery', which was shortlisted for the Wilderness Society's Environment Award for Children's Literature earlier this year, is available for purchase on Amazon as a paperback or ebook. See www.amazon.com/author/emmajhomes

Aimed at children 8–11, 'Red-Tail Recovery' tells the story of Ruthie, a young girl who helps her wildlife scientist parents to save the red-tailed black cockatoo (south-eastern subspecies).

We congratulate Emma on the success of her book and in making the shortlist for the Environment Award for Children's Literature. What a wonderful achievement – well done Emma!

BIRDLIFE AUSTRALIA'S 2018 'WOODLAND BIRDS' CALENDAR

The Australian bush would be a strange and eerie place without birds—the screeching of parrots echoing through the trees, the busy chattering of wrens and the multitudinous whistling of honeyeaters help make up the music of our forests—and are part of what make this land so special. In 2018, we're celebrating these splendid birds with our woodland bird calendar. Featuring twelve special birds, from the tiny Forty-spotted Pardalote to our charismatic Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo, revel in twelve months with these bush gems.

This year, we are selling limited edition sets of woodland bird Christmas Cards too—but stocks are strictly limited, so make sure you

get in fast. Calendars cost \$19.95 including postage while the Christmas cards come in sets of thirteen with envelopes and cost \$19.95.

Order yours today—with all profits from the 2018 calendar going towards our vital conservation work across the nation your purchase will make a real difference to our birds (and a great Christmas gift!). To order your calendar visit the BirdLife Australia e-store at <https://store.birdlife.org.au/>

Cara Schultz
BirdLife Australia



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Australia's voice for birds since 1901

BirdLife Australia is dedicated to achieving outstanding conservation results for our native birds and their habitats.

With our specialised knowledge and the commitment of an Australia-wide network of volunteers and supporters, we are creating a bright future for Australia's birds.

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Enjoy the rewards of membership, making a real difference for our native birds



Contributing your time is one of the most effective ways to help



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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