

Red-tail News

Issue 47 December 2018



WELCOME TO THE 2018 CHRISTMAS EDITION OF RED-TAIL NEWS.

Edition 47 of Red-tail News (RTN) brings you a collection of new stories covering the highs and lows of the recovery program since our March edition. We start with an incredible boost in funding for Red-tail conservation and recovery as a result of the latest round of National Landcare Funding.

Over the next five years, the Australian Government will invest more than \$4 million dollars in conservation efforts for the cockatoo across the sub-species range in the South East of South Australia and South West Victoria.

The South East Natural Resources Management Board (SENRMB), Wimmera Catchment Management Authority (WCMA) and Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority (GHCMA) were all successful in securing project funding for Red-tails under the Australian Government's Regional Land Partnerships of the National Landcare Program.

The 'Communities helping Cockies', 'Food for the Future' and 'Red-tails of the Glenelg Plain' projects will see the

delivery of large-scale on-ground habitat works, community engagement and population monitoring in partnership with Natural Resources South East, WCMA, GHCMA, BirdLife Australia, the SERTBC Recovery Team, Trees for Life, Zoos SA, Greening Australia, Trust for Nature, Barengi Gadjin Land Council, the Kowree Farm Tree Group and others to help secure a healthy population of Red-tails for generations to come.

This much needed boost in funding will see the delivery of new project activities for the cockatoo and the continuation of existing programs including 'Cockies helping Cockies', 'Kids helping Cockies' and core population monitoring activities such as the Annual Count.

Another significant win for Red-tails was the approval of amendment C82 of the Glenelg Planning Scheme. The amendment has greatly improved local planning laws to allow for much better protection of key habitats of the cockatoo across the entire range of sub-species in the Glenelg Shire.

In not so good news our annual flock counts (held after the annual count in May) have revealed yet another poor year of breeding. Results are not so dissimilar to that recorded in 2016 where there was an unprecedented decline in barred birds (adult females and juveniles). Worryingly, stringybark seed crop assessments have shown that there is very little food available for the cockatoos at present, which isn't a good sign for breeding this year.

In this edition we will also hear updates from Kerry Gilkes and her cohort of landholders who have been helping to plant more food trees for the cockatoos,

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birds are in our nature




birdlife
AUSTRALIA

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PhD student Daniella Teixeira who is working on developing bioacoustic methods for monitoring nesting success, Greening Australia who have been working hard to restore large areas of degraded stringybark woodlands in south west Victoria and myself on progress with the popular 'Kids helping Cockies' project.

We are also seeking sighting information to help locate new nests sites for the cockatoo as part of 'Red-tail Nest Incentive' Scheme. Anyone who sees Red-tails or knows where they could be nesting is encouraged to contact 1800 262 062 or email redtail@birdlife.org.au with their sighting. You can of course visit our website www.redtail.com.au to report sightings and find out more information on nesting birds.

Lastly, as some of you may already know this will be my last newsletter as I am finishing up in the Project Coordinator role at the end of the year. It's been a fantastic nine years in the job (with a few kids in between). I've been lucky enough to have met and worked with so many wonderful people during this time and together we've achieved some positive outcomes for Red-tails.

Although I'm handing over the coordinator reins some of you may be happy to know I will still be involved in the recovery

program working one day per week with BirdLife to deliver the 'Kids helping Cockies' component of the 'Communities helping Cockies' project in SA.

The remainder of my week (in between raising our young family and account keeping for our family fishing business) will be spent completing a teaching degree – which is something I've been passionate about starting for some time now.

As for my successor, BirdLife Australia are currently in the process of recruiting a new SERTBC Project Coordinator, who we hope to have on deck early next year. Please be sure to welcome/introduce yourself when that person comes on board.

Lastly a big thank you to everyone who has supported me on my Red-tail journey, BirdLife Australia and our dynamic and active Recovery Team and chairs, our project partners/supporters, our dedicated flock of volunteers (this project wouldn't be possible without you) and to all our 'Red-tail News' readers for caring and taking an interest in the plight of our 'iconic' cockatoo.

"Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not." – Dr Seuss, The Lorax.

Many thanks, Bronwyn

'COMMUNITIES HELPING COCKIES' – \$3.2 MILLION TO PROTECT ENDANGERED SOUTH-EASTERN RED-TAILED BLACK-COCKATOOS

The South East Natural Resources Management Board has secured \$3.2m in funding over five years from the Australian Government to help protect the endangered South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo.

The partnership project with Trees For Life, BirdLife Australia and Zoos SA will continue the legacy created by the South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo Recovery Team over the last 22 years of its work with land managers and the community.

Trees For Life Revegetation Services Manager and Recovery Team Chair, Vicki-Jo Russell said the new project will build on previous work, and initiate new paths of community involvement.

"We'll be building on previous sites and work with the community, like the successful Cockies Helping Cockies project that started in 2009," Vicki-Jo said.

"Project partners will also be working with land managers and community on private and public land, and propagating more buloke, one of the few species the cockatoo will eat."

The new project team will be seeking the support of the community in a variety of ways, including extending and regenerating habitat, planting feed and nest trees and help control weeds, nursing new buloke and stringybark trees to life, and engaging with students to tell the story of the South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo's vulnerability and how people can help to protect it.

"It's community and landholder commitment to the project that make it possible," explained Zoos SA Conservation Manager Dr Liberty Olds.

BirdLife Australia's Recovery Project Coordinator Bronwyn Perryman agreed and highlighted the importance of this special species in the region.

"The Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo is a much-loved flagship species for our region," Bronwyn said. "Our work will benefit the landscape and many other species at the same time. It's so important that we continue to work with the community to ensure these magnificent birds remain in our landscape for many generations to come".

This project is supported by the Australian Government's Regional Land Partnerships initiative of the National Landcare Program and South East Natural Resources Management Board.

To get involved, report a sighting or to find out more, visit the South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo Recovery Team's website www.redtail.com.au or call Project Coordinator Bronwyn Perryman on 1800 262 062.

Alison Boomsma

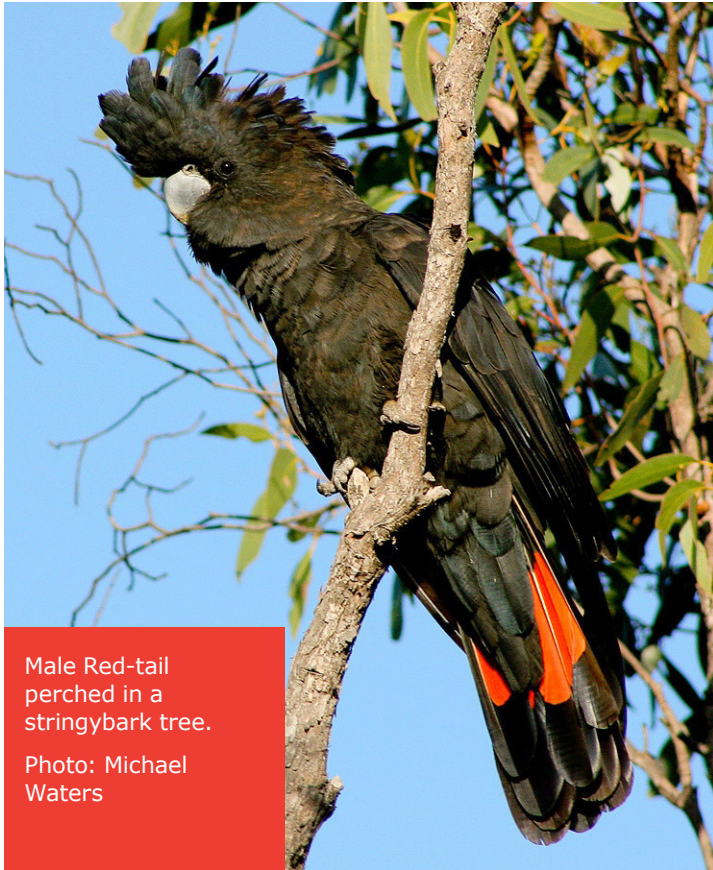
Natural Resources South East National Landcare Program Communication Coordinator



A small flock of Red-tails in stringybark trees near Naracoorte.

Photo: Luke Leddy

'FOOD FOR THE FUTURE' - IMPROVING THE HABITAT OF THE SOUTH-EASTERN RED-TAILED BLACK-COCKATOO (SERTBC) IN THE WIMMERA



Male Red-tail perched in a stringybark tree.

Photo: Michael Waters

Wimmera CMA in partnership with Birdlife, Greening Australia, Trust for Nature, Barengi Gadjin Land Council and the Kowree Tree Farm Group with funding from the Australian Government's Regional Land Partnerships of the National Landcare Program will take action to improve the habitat of the SERTBC.

This integrated tenure blind project aims to improve the trajectory of the recruitment of SERTBC by supporting land managers and the community to protect and enhance existing and create new SERTBC feeding and nesting habitat to achieve an increase in the overall extent. These on-ground activities will be supported by priority scientific population and habitat monitoring using well established methodologies to inform targeted management actions.

Community support and participation in the project is essential to achieve the outcomes and improve the trajectory of the SERTBC. This project will raise awareness and build community capacity to participate in recovery actions across all sectors of the community including landholders, school, community groups, government and non-government agencies and the local indigenous community.

The project will deliver seven key activities to improve the trajectory of the SERTBC.

- **Habitat Incentives Program:** The habitat incentive program will address the key threats of land use change, clearing, weed infestation and over grazing of SERTBC habitat by inviting individual landholders through public and targeted expressions of interest to register their interest in receiving financial assistance to undertake management actions that improve the condition of SERTBC habitat on their properties.
- **Scattered Paddock Tree Project:** This activity supports local schools to grow and plant 1000 scattered stringybark and buloke trees at key sites on private land through

consultation with landholders in the Wimmera. Planting of scattered stringybark and buloke will provide considerable food benefits to the cockatoo in the future and strong engagement and education opportunities through participating schools learning about the needs and threats to the SERTBC and participating directly in propagation and planting activities.

- **Installation of nest boxes:** 25 nest boxes will be constructed and installed at priority nesting sites in the Wimmera.
- **Planting 10,000 Bulokes:** 35ha of the Ozenkadnook Bank Australia Conservation Reserve will be revegetated with 10,000 buloke seedlings. The area selected for revegetation is adjacent to existing priority nesting and feeding sites and working with Bank Australia will ensure that the plantings are maintained into the future with the project promoted through the Bank's Conservation programs.
- **Hollow Audit:** The audit will work with the local community and volunteers to assess the availability of large nesting hollows at 5 locations to be advised by the SERTBC Recovery Team. Using a citizen science approach data collected by volunteers will include GPS location, tree height, diameter at breast height, hollow size, angle and aspect, a photo and other observations pertaining to occupancy.
- **Establishment of an Indigenous 'Red-tail Rangers' works crew:** Wimmera CMA will work with Barengi Gadjin Land Council and the local indigenous community to engage locals to participate in recovery actions to improve the trajectory of the SERTBC whilst working on country and undertaking training and skill development.
- **Community Support and Engagement:** BirdLife Australia and the Recovery Team will manage and coordinate core recovery plan monitoring and community engagement activities including the range-wide annual count, indigenous capacity building events, presentations to school groups, threat mitigation activities, provision of technical advice and support to partner organisations undertaking habitat restoration and protection activities, and management/coordination of the recovery program.

For more information or to get involved please contact the Wimmera CMA or the SERTBC Project Coordinator on 1800 262 062.

Luke Austin

Wimmera Catchment Management Authority's Manager for Operational Delivery



Twenty five nest boxes will be installed at priority nesting sites in the Wimmera as part of the 'Food for the Future' project.

Photo: Richard Hill

HELP NEEDED TO FIND COCKATOOS AND NESTS

BirdLife Australia and the Recovery Team are again seeking your support to help locate flocks and nest sites of our endangered cockatoos.

Since 2011, we have implemented a nest incentive program to help locate new Red-tail nests across its range in SA and Victoria. The scheme has been particularly effective with 31 new nests located thanks to information provided by the community.

This year, due to a change in funding, incentives are only being offered for new nests found in South Australia. Landholders and members of the public can receive a \$500 reward for information leading to the confirmation of a new nest.

Red-tails nest in large hollows close to their stringybark feeding habitat. These typically occur in very old, large eucalypts such as Red Gums. Dead Red Gums in paddocks are favoured, but Red-tails will also nest in other eucalypts (live and dead) with suitable sized hollows.

Unlike other species of Black-Cockatoos, its uncommon for Red-tails to return to the same nest year after year. Nest selection depends on the availability of food (stringybark seeds) within close proximity to nest sites. This makes finding active nests always a challenge.

What makes it more challenging is that many nests are located on private-land, which without the support of the landholder remain undetected if not reported.

As always, we are eager to find more nests across the range, especially in South Australia where there are very few known nests. But we need your help to do so.

Most landholders are protective of their nests and some are reluctant to provide information on nesting Red-tails for fear of disturbing nests or that knowledge of their nest sites will result in them having to manage these in a certain way. This is not at all the case.

Great care is taken when carrying out nest inspections with all nest observations done at distance to avoid disturbance to nesting birds. Nest inspections do not involve looking into nest hollows or handling of chicks or eggs. The only nest information we collect on site is the location of the nest (GPS coordinate), nest tree species and type (ie Dead Red Gum Paddock Tree), hollow aspect and whether birds are using it. Landholders are encouraged to contact the Project Coordinator on 1800 262 062 should they have any concerns.

Knowing where nests are can help us to protect eggs and chicks from nest raiding predators such as Brush tail possums through tree collaring. It also allows us to monitor the outcome of nests to find out which nests succeed (fledge young) and those that fail, and why this may be the case. This is now more important than ever given many years of repeated poor breeding.

For the last two years, the Recovery Team has been working closely with PhD student Daniella Teixeira to explore whether bioacoustic methods (sounds recordings) can be used to cost effectively monitor nests and see if young birds successfully leave the nest (fledge).

Daniella's research has shown that we can in fact determine the outcome of nests using bioacoustic technology, which provides a non-invasive, costs effective alternative to more traditional nest monitoring methods. In the coming years we hope to be able to monitor large numbers of nests each year using the methodology developed as part of Dani's research.

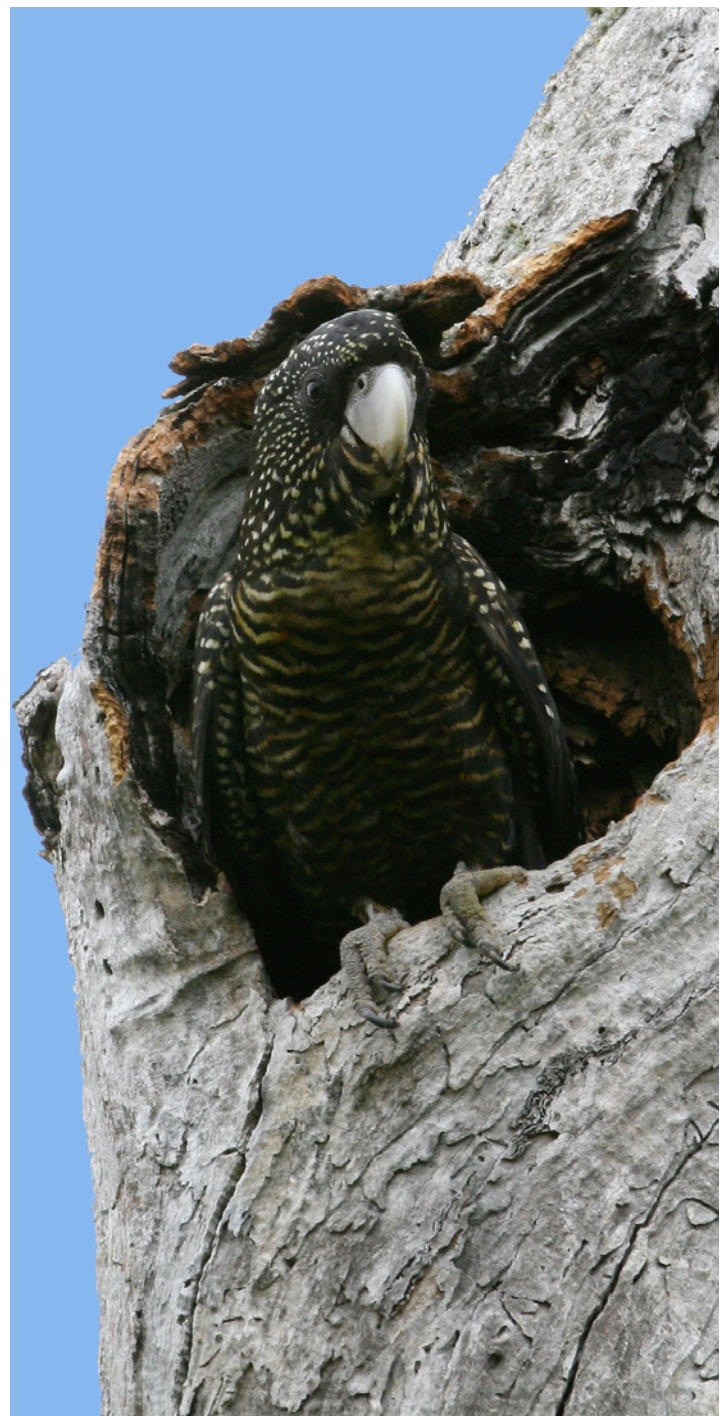
Sighting information provided by the public can help to locate nest sites. Anyone who sees Red-tails or knows where they

may be nesting is encouraged to contact the coordinator with their sighting. Of particular interest is sightings of single adult males or pairs of Red-tails coming into water or trees with large hollows, as these are indicators of nesting birds.

As you will know, making a report is simple and can be done by phoning 1800 262 062; sending an email to redtail@birdlife.org.au or by visiting the website www.redtail.com.au. All we need is the date and time of sighting, number of Red-tails, the location (preferably a grid reference), and what the birds were doing (ie feeding, flying, drinking etc).

For more information about the nest incentive scheme, conditions of payment and/or information on Red-tail nesting behaviour please contact 1800 262 062 or visit our website www.redtail.com.au.

Bronwyn Perryman



COCKIES CHAMPION COCKY CONSERVATION

Landholders continue to support the South Eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo through the Zoos SA 'Cockies Helping Cockies' Project with support from the Australian Government and the South East Natural Resource Management Board.

This year eight properties revegetated stringybark habitat across a total of 52.6Ha. The sites planted in June have benefited from the good rains we have been receiving through spring. The project also received assistance from the Limestone Coast Scouts Group which saw 60 children and 35 adults learn about Red-tails and assisted the project and a local landholder by removing tree guards from their revegetation sites.

A landholder dinner was held at the recently renovated Lucindale Hotel and we were able to share a 5-minute video which has been produced to talk about Red-tails, how we can help through projects such as the 'Cockies Helping Cockies' Project working across the landscape and highlight some of the key principles underpinning the success of the project.

The video captures revegetation work and remnant stringybark habitat which has been fenced off to help provide a food resource for the birds into the future since the project commenced nine years ago. Three local landholders contributed to the making of the video talking about their experience working with the Cockies Project over the years. The project has been a real collaborative effort starting with the landholder, the nursery grower, the direct seeding contractor, the planting crew and everyone in between who have contributed to make the on-ground work successful.

Kerry Gilkes the project contractor said "It's a real team effort by everyone, we all enjoy working together, it's a rewarding process for everyone involved".

The 'Cockies Helping Cockies' will continue to build on the good work completed over the past nine years with a further five years of funding received through the Australian Government's Regional Land Partnership program.

If you are in South Australia and are interested in undertaking any stringybark habitat revegetation work or fencing off remnant stringybark habitat on your property please contact Kerry Gilkes m: 0429 660 027.

*Kerry Gilkes
Zoos SA Cockies helping Cockies Project Facilitator*



*Stringybark revegetation corridor established earlier this year as part of the 'Cockies helping Cockies' project.
Photo: Kerry Gilkes*



*Limestone Coast Scouts Group removing tree guards at 'Cockies helping Cockies' revegetation sites.
Photo: Kerry Gilkes*

COCKIES CONTINUE TO PROVE ELUSIVE – 2018 ANNUAL COUNT

More than 175 volunteers participated in the annual count for Red-tails back on 5 May across the cockatoo's range in the South East of South Australia and South West Victoria.

Despite the huge search effort, which saw over 3600kms of stringybark forest tracks covered, our cockies proved once again elusive with less than a third of our counters locating Red-tails on the day.

After taking into consideration double counts and two additional sightings of Red-tails recorded on days either side of the count the final tally stood at 839 birds - which is slightly more than the 810 birds recorded last year.

A total of 43 sightings were made on the day, however many of these were double counts of the same birds.

The distribution of sightings was again widespread with one flock seen as far north as McCallum (40km NE of Keith). Flock sizes were also smaller than usual with only four large flocks (greater than 80 birds) recorded.

Red-tails are notoriously difficult to find. What makes it more challenging is when flock sizes are small, widespread and located in areas that our counters can't access, such as private land. Larger flocks are often noisier and so more likely to be detected than smaller flocks, while birds on private land can be easily missed if not for the support of the landholder.

Weather conditions also play a big part in the number of birds counted on the day. This year we experienced less than ideal conditions (wet and windy) in both the lead up to the count and on the day - across most parts of the range. Windy conditions make hearing birds difficult and let's face it - you're more likely to hear a Red-tail before you see one.

Although total numbers are down, it's unlikely the population has suffered a mass decline since our biggest count of over 1500 birds back in 2015. It's more likely that birds were scattered widely across their range and simply missed on the day.

The overall prognosis for the population, however, is far from good.

Flock counts, which are undertaken after the annual count and provide our best indication of breeding success, have revealed a disturbing trend with declining numbers of females and juveniles recorded in flocks over time.

Fewer adult females means fewer breeding pairs and thus fewer offspring; fewer juveniles means less birds available to replace present breeding pairs in future.

Unfortunately, the last good breeding event was more than 10 years ago. Breeding success is strongly linked to stringybark food availability, with more successful breeding in years of plentiful food.

This year, large flocks were found near Rennick, Chetwynd, Wattle Range (west of Penola) and Mumbannar. The biggest of these comprised 135 birds drinking from a trough on private land adjacent Rennick State Forest.

Other sightings were made near Harrow, Gorokey, Charam, Wandilo, Dry Creek, Dergholm, Lake Mundi, Heywood, Willalooka, Clear Lake, Lucindale, McCallum and Casterton.

Interestingly, many flocks seen this year were found on private land which is why the widespread efforts of landholders to put feeding habitat back on their properties is so important.

The annual Baileys' Rocks campout was again well attended with around 30 volunteers braving cold conditions to share results and tales from another long days counting. This year's biggest counters were Adrienne and Trudy who counted the large flock at Rennick.

BirdLife Australia and the SERTBC Recovery Team would like to thank all the wonderful volunteers involved on the day including those who reported sightings in the lead up to the count.

This year we had a great mix of new and returning participants comprising interested local volunteers, farmers who chose to survey their own stringybark patches, and interstate participants many of whom travelled long distances to take part. Without their incredible effort, this event would not be possible.

Finally, a special thanks to Evan Roberts, Kerry Gilkes and Felicity Lord 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.

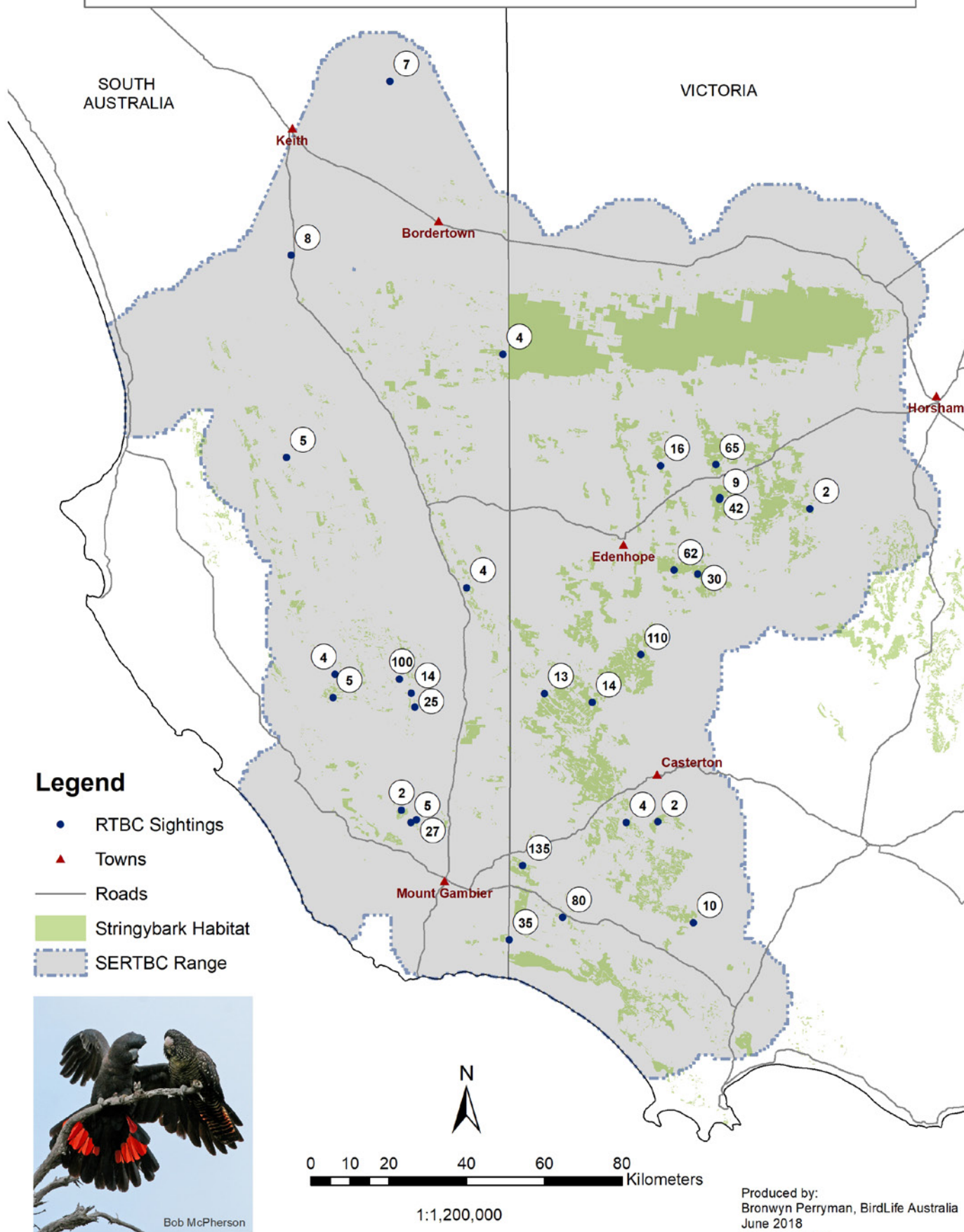
Bronwyn Perryman



Thirty volunteers attended the annual Baileys Rock Campout following the count.

Photo: Tim Burnard

South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo Sightings 2018 Annual Count



Observations of South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos counted as part of the 2018 Annual Count.

COCKIES IN CRISIS

As long-term readers of the Red-tail news know, each year in late autumn early winter, immediately after the annual count, we do our 'flock counts'. Flock counts are our main measure of how red tails are faring. These counts very carefully work out the proportions of adult males and barred birds in flocks. Barred birds represent all adult females and young less than four years old.

Over the past 21 years that we have collected these data, we have seen the number of barred birds vary around an average of 58%. In the past three years we have seen very poor results with this year only 53% of flocks being barred birds. Thus it appears there has been very little successful breeding over the past three years. We have observed this only once before in 2016 when 51% of flocks were barred birds.

The 2016 data suggested very poor breeding success for the three years prior or back to 2013. The best interpretation of these data is that there has been little successful breeding over the past five or so years. For a bird with a generation time which might be only 5 - 10 years, this is a very concerning result.

The recovery team is working on new ideas to try and understand trends in population better. Our current hypothesis is that food quality, that is good quality stringybark seed crops, have been much poorer over the past several years and that has reduced nesting success of cockatoos very markedly. Dani's PhD is part of this new work. Her new bioacoustic methods should allow us to get much better information on nesting success.

Last year we reviewed and expanded our food monitoring to provide a better understanding of food availability from year to year.

Paul Koch reports that recently-completed field work in the stringybark found very low levels of capsules in much of the desert stringybark areas in the northern part of the cockatoo's range. So it appears that very large areas of stringybark woodland are currently providing very little food for cockatoos. It's a worrying sign.

Richard Hill

Senior Biodiversity Officer with the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning



Red-tails will often water at stock troughs. Photo: Tim Burnard

FLEDGE OR FAIL: UPDATE ON ACOUSTIC NEST MONITORING PROJECT

Over the past few months, I have been busy analysing all the sounds collected at Red-tail nests during the 2016-17 and 2017-18 breeding seasons. What this really means is that I have spent more time than I care to admit looking at spectrograms (visual representations of sounds) to pick out red-tails' calls.

Thankfully, the human brain is remarkably good at pattern recognition, so over time I've become much quicker at being able to pick out red-tails' calls amongst the cacophony of other species and background noise. I'm currently developing methods for a computer to do this recognition instead, but for this I need to get lots of example calls to 'train' the algorithm.

Over the two breeding seasons, I found and monitored a total of 23 nests. We had problems with the recorders at seven nests, so we don't know if they survived. Excluding those, six nests - or 37.5% - survived to fledging. This figure may seem low, but it's not much different from what we know from other cockatoo species.

At this point, we're not sure why some nests fledge and others fail. There were only one or two nests where I believe predation may have been the reason, but at the others it seems that the nests were abandoned early in the season - either at the egg stage or soon after hatching. Possible reasons might include unfertilised eggs, poor genetic quality, or insufficient access to food.

Since we know how specialised red-tails are in their diet, next year I plan to analyse whether fledging or failure relates to the availability of food in the landscape.

For now, we will again be placing sound recorders at any nests found, to hopefully shed some more light on the nesting behaviours of the south-eastern red-tails.

For project updates, please follow Black-Cockatoo Project on Instagram and Facebook @blackcockatoproject.

Daniella Teixeira

PhD Candidate, Centre for Biodiversity and Conservation Science at The University of Queensland



Red-tail nestling at entrance of nest hollow monitored by Dani as part of her PhD research. Photo Daniella Teixeira

IMPROVED PROTECTION FOR RED-TAIL HABITATS IN THE GLENELG SHIRE

A significant highlight for the recovery project this year has included the approval of Amendment C82 of the Glenelg Planning Scheme – South eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo Habitat by the Victorian Minister of Planning back in early May.

The amendment, which has taken over four years to complete, has greatly improved local planning laws to allow for much better protection of critical food and nest trees of the cockatoo across the entire range of the sub-species in the Glenelg Shire. This includes the protection of scattered paddock stringybark trees which are of significant food value to Red-tails.

The Glenelg Planning Scheme's previous Schedule 3 to the Environment Significance Overlay (ESO3) was introduced to the Glenelg Planning Scheme in 1998. Since then our knowledge of the cockatoos, their distribution, habitat needs and main threats to the population have significantly increased. We now know that limited food supply is a major cause of the species decline and that they breed throughout their range in large hollow bearing trees (dead or alive) in close proximity to feeding habitat.

Under the previous ESO3, only Dead River Red Gums (over 60cm in diameter) across a limited section of the species range were protected. The latest ESO3 now affords protection to both food and nest trees of the cockatoo across the entire known distribution in the Glenelg Shire, integrating both best practice and current knowledge.

Changes to local planning laws in the Glenelg Shire are now consistent with those of the West Wimmera Planning Scheme's ESO2, both in terms of policy content and the approach taken to mapping.

The amendment also provides improved clarity to landholders regarding the assessment of clearance applications and how

offsets be considered and applied to ensure habitat values are appropriately retained.

BirdLife Australia and the Recovery Team would like to congratulate the Glenelg Shire Council for their support and hard work to progress the amendment to improve habitat protections for the cockatoo across the Shire.

We would also like to thank Bruce Lindsay from Environmental Justice Australia who worked tirelessly to prepare submissions, improve policy content and represent BirdLife Australia at Panel; Martine Maron for her advice and knowledge regarding policy content and for her meticulously prepared expert witness report which she presented at Panel; Urbanscale Consultants for their hard work in developing the supporting documentation, explanatory report and initial draft policy wording; Vicki-Jo Russell, Tim Burnard, Gill Bradshaw and Andrew Bradey for their significant contribution and submissions at Panel; Pete Copley, Richard Hill and Paul Koch for their expert advice, and to all the other submitters and organisations involved in this process.

We would also like to acknowledge and thank our project funders. This project would not have been possible without the financial support of BirdLife Australia donors, The Ubergang Foundation and Maddern Sainsbury Foundation and the Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program.

It's certainly a wonderful achievement for Red-tail conservation and one that we all should feel very proud to have been a part of.

Bronwyn Perryman



Male Red-tail feeding on stringybark.

Photo:
Geoffrey Dabb

RESTORING DEGRADED STRINGYBARK WOODS - INCREASING CRITICAL FOOD SUPPLY FOR THE ENDANGERED SOUTH-EASTERN RED-TAILED BLACK-COCKATOO

Greening Australia staff recently finalised the instalment of over 2,000 hectares of public land revegetation to complete the project 'Increasing Critical Food Supply for the Endangered South-Eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo' funded by the Australian Government through the 20 Million Trees initiative.

The project has been principally devoted to restoring trees that provide a crucial food resource for the endangered cockatoo on degraded public land where natural tree recruitment has been observed to be sub-optimal due to a range of factors including wildfire and woody weed invasion.

Fruits of Brown and Desert Stringybark (*Eucalyptus baxteri* and *Eucalyptus aranacea*) provide the bulk of available food resources utilized by the SE Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo and projects which can achieve a substantial increase in these eucalypt species will make a strong contribution toward the long-term survival prospects of the bird.

The project aimed to restore Stringybark trees to degraded state forest areas primarily in the Casterton region in far south west Victoria by using a combination of tube-stock and hand direct seeding. Over 150,000 tube-stock seedlings were installed during the project; as well more than 1,400 hectares of hand direct seeding plots were deployed at a rate of 250 per hectare.

"This would have to be the largest direct seeding effort of its kind in Australia with an 8-man crew able to cover over 80 hectares of degraded woodland in a day. We think we may have only just scratched the surface in the fight to provide more food resources for the bird, but nevertheless this project has been a monumental on ground effort any way you want to look at it," said Greening Australia's Senior Project Officer Doug Phillips.

From the project's outset Greening Australia staff were concerned that conventional tube-stock installation and direct seeding in the sandy nutrient poor soils found near Casterton would potentially result in inadequate plant growth to enable

substantial survivals following the summer/autumn periods where modern day conditions have been extremely hot and dry compared with long-term averages.

Greening Australia staff decided that to boost plant growth all tube-stock seedling plantings would incorporate fertiliser tablets at the bottom of each planting hole. GA staff also incorporated fertilisers into direct seeding mixtures along with ingredients such as compost and biochar in seeking to promote elevated seedling growth following germination.

Mr. Phillips said, "With the impacts of climate change upon us we considered that 'business as usual' revegetation was not the appropriate response to the conditions on the ground. Extensive punnet trialling clearly established that fertiliser inputs accelerated Stringybark seedling growth responses hence our universal adoption in the field."

"This has been a ground-breaking project in every sense of the word which challenged conventional thinking requiring us to use considerable innovation both in deployment methodologies and the use of planting amendments," said Greening Australia's Regional Manager Dave Warne.

During the project Greening Australia staff established several monitoring lines using different fertiliser ratios to measure for growth and survivals, as well staff installed fully randomized scientific tube-stock fertiliser trials in different environments comparing responses to two types of fertiliser tablets.

Notably through the Victorian Government's Biodiversity Response planning process Greening Australia will be able to continue on from the previous project with funding to install another 70,000 Stringybarks over the next three years.

"In order to save this beautiful bird, we need to throw everything at the effort I reckon, it's the very least we should be doing," Mr. Phillips concluded.

Doug Phillips

Senior Project Officer with Greening Australia



Top Left – Direct seeding mixture
Top Right – Hand direct seeding equipment
Bottom – Hand direct seeding progress and results

Photos: Doug Phillips & Dave Warne

KIDS HELPING COCKIES

BirdLife Australia and Natural Resources South East have recently secured more funding from the Australian Government's Regional Land Partnerships of the National Landcare Program to continue to deliver the popular 'Kids helping Cockies' program.

The 'Kids Helping Cockies' project works with local schools and students to grow and plant out stringybark food trees for Red-tails across the range of the cockatoo in South Australia. The program involves presentations to students on the biology and habitat requirements of Red-tails, stringybark seed collection and harvesting, seed planting, germination of stringybark seedlings and planting grown seedlings at revegetation sites to establish more feeding habitat for cockatoos.

The program, which started in 2012, has resulted in presentations to over 2900 students from 32 schools about Red-tails and the establishment of nine ongoing school nursery programs to grow and plant out stringybark seedlings for localised habitat revegetation projects for the cockatoo.

This year we have been working with 215 students from seven schools including Allendale East Area School, Frances Primary School, Glenburnie Primary School, Lucindale Area School, Newbery Park Primary School, Naracoorte South Primary School and Tenison Woods College.

Each school has been involved in presentations about the cockatoo, participated in seed collection activities, harvested and cleaned collected seed and planted the seed ready for germination in their school nurseries.

We expect the schools will produce a combined 2000 seedlings ready for planting in June next year. Some schools have already observed germination which we hope will progress over the school holidays.

Whilst out on their seed collection excursion, Glenburnie Primary School students were lucky enough to see a small flock of Red-tails feeding in stringybark at Nangwarry Native Forest Reserve.

The kids were so excited and amazed to see the birds and were even able to get some great iPad footage of the birds flying overhead. The Year 2/3 class have been researching the birds and have made an e-book all about the cockatoos which we hope to be able to feature on our website early next year. The students at Allendale East Area School were also treated to a Red-tail cultural experience with 'Uncle Ken' from Bush Repair who shared with them a Boandik dreamtime story of how the cockatoos got their tail colours. The students were thoroughly engaged in this experience, as too was I.

We hope to work with Uncle Ken next year to develop the story into a book illustrated by the students. The students also worked to create a collage of Red-tails feathers which will be on display at our site at the Lucindale Field Days in March next year.

If your school is interested in getting involved in this great program please contact me on 0438 317 024 or email bronwyn.perryman@birdlife.org.au.



Porchia Helps from Lucindale Area School helped to pot and plant hundreds of stringybark seeds collected through the 'Kids helping Cockies' Project.
Photo: Kerry Gilkes



Glenburnie Primary School kids collecting stringybark seed at Nangwarry Native Forest Reserve. Photo: Judy Noble



Naracoorte South Primary School students learning all about the biology, habitat requirements and conservation needs of Red-tails. Photo: Sam Power



A collage of feathers created by the Year 3 Allendale East Area School Students during these session with 'Uncle Ken'. Photo: Bron Perryman



Tenison Woods College kids harvest and clean the seed from stringybark seed capsules as part of the 'Kids Helping Cockies' Project.
Photo: Elsie Stoel

FUNDING ACKNOWLEDGMENT:

BirdLife Australia's SERTBC Recovery Program is supported by the South East Natural Resources Management Board and Wimmera Catchment Management Authority in partnership with Trees For Life, Zoos SA, Greening Australia, Trust for Nature, Barengi Gadjin Land Council and Kowree Farm Tree Group through funding from the Australian Government's Regional Land Partnerships of the National Landcare Program.

Pair of Red-tails sighted by volunteer observer Mike Sverns in Yallakar State Forest following the 2018 Annual Count.

Photo: Mike Sverns.



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