

Red-tail News

Issue 38 March 2014

WELCOME

Welcome to the New Year and the 2014 summer edition of Red-tail News. We hope you all had a lovely Christmas and relaxing New Year break. This year we look forward to bringing you all the latest news and updates regarding our charismatic cockatoos, and hope that you too can become involved in our recovery efforts to help save this endangered bird.

In this edition we farewell our joint Recovery Team chairs, Martine and Vicki-Jo and welcome Tim Burnard to the role. We also take a look at some localised projects and provide information about how you can become involved in this year's annual count. Happy Reading.

Bronwyn Perryman



Male South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo in stringybark.

Photo Michael Waters

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HUNGRY BIRDS DON'T BREED

One of the most important things we have learned about Red-tails is that their biggest problem is a lack of their main food; that is stringybark capsules less than a year old. From the PhD research of Paul Koch, we know that the birds spend most of the day feeding, and almost all the decent-quality feeding habitat appears to be used. So years when little of their preferred food is available are probably 'crunch' years, and these years keep the population low. Burning of stringybark, and losses of stringybark and buloke trees, further exacerbates the problem.

With the help of Masters in Conservation Biology student Michelle Duong, we now have a better understanding than ever of how food availability affects the Red-tail population. Michelle has been drawing on data collected by many volunteers and Recovery Team members, along with Paul Koch's work on food availability, to analyse how Red-tail recruitment varies among years. Her work has confirmed that the best predictor of a year with a high proportion of adult males in the population (implying lower breeding success in recent years) is food availability over the preceding three years. So the less food there has been recently, the fewer immature birds.

Michelle has also been analysing the nest location database that has been contributed to by many volunteers and researchers over the years, and was recently boosted through the nest incentive scheme. The Recovery Team has known for some time that nests are more likely to be close to blocks of stringybark, but we now have more detail on the Red-tails' preferences. Nests are strongly associated with stringybark, particularly desert stringybark, and are more likely to be where there is stringybark within a 3-km radius. Travelling a long way to feed is energetically costly, so it makes sense to nest near good food sources.

The strengthening of our understanding of how the population is affected by reducing food availability emphasises the importance of protecting remaining feed trees, and reducing the amount of stringybark that is burnt, which is currently at an historic high.

Martine Maron





The new Recovery Team Chair, Tim Burnard sharing a hug with Karak.

FAREWELL TO OUR JOINT CHAIRS

On behalf of the Red-tail Recovery Team we would sincerely like to thank Martine Maron and Vicki-Jo Russell for their outstanding contribution, in their roles as joint chairs, to the Recovery Team and Red-tail Conservation and Recovery as a whole. After stepping into the role in 2010 both ladies have worked tirelessly to pave the way for a stronger Recovery Team and brighter future for our Red-tails. The ladies joint chairing role has seen a myriad of complementing skill sets brought together resulting in some real positive changes for Red-tail conservation across the cockatoo's range in SA and Victoria.

Their advice and support over the last three years has been second to none and highly valued amongst staff and Recovery Team members. We would like to wish both Martine and Vicki-Jo all the best for their futures endeavours, and are thrilled that they are going stay on as active members of the Team.

Big Hugs, Bron and Team.

On that note I'd like to give a big warm welcome to Tim Burnard, who many of you would know already, as he steps into the role of Recovery Team Chair as of January 2014.



Members of the South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo Recovery Team, November 2013.

HELLO FROM TIM BURNARD, THE NEW CHAIRPERSON

I consider it an honour, but also a bit of a daunting challenge to be elected Chair to the Red-tail Recovery Team commencing January 2014. Some readers will be aware that I'm not exactly new to the team. I was employed as Red-tail Extension Officer over 16 years ago and left after four years in the job. Since then I have been wheeled out several times to fill in for various staff on leave whilst always maintaining a seat on the Recovery Team.

My first duty as Chair is to thank Martine Maron and Vicki-Jo Russell (VJ) for Chairing the team since June 2010. It has been a pretty unenviable task in some respects, mostly due to very uncertain funding that resulted in a halving of staff levels. Despite this, Martine and VJ kept the Recovery Team churning out a high level of work that has strongly influenced natural resource management in the Red-tail range. This is an important thing to keep in mind; while the Red-tail recovery team focuses on issues that affect our bird, the outcomes from our work are beneficial to the environment at a landscape scale across south west Victoria and south east South Australia.

An obvious example of the impact the Recovery Team has on broad environmental issues is limiting the severity of planned burns on the environment. DEPI (Vic) and DEWNR (SA) now take great care to minimise canopy scorch when undertaking planned burns. This is extremely important for Red-tails as well as a huge number of other species of fauna and flora. Martine and VJ have been instrumental in changing department attitudes to burning the environment.

Another great innovation in the past 3 ½ years is the introduction of the Nest Incentive scheme, a first in Australia

where farmers (and other community members) can be rewarded up to \$500 for locating Red-tail nests. And then there has been the Kids Helping Cockies project which encourages schools to get involved in growing Red-tail habitat trees. This was a spinoff of the highly successful Cockies Helping Cockies project that is overseen by VJ and Zoos SA. Meanwhile Martine oversaw a complete review of our science team and has supervised several new projects that are helping to tie up some loose ends in our knowledge of Red-tail habitat needs.

This very important work is often unseen by people outside of the Recovery Team. On the one hand we have projects that are resulting in thousands of acres of rehabilitation and on the other we have developed our scientific understanding so that we can advise other agencies (like CMAs, NRM Boards and Government Departments) on what actions they can take that help all manner of species in the Red-tail range. Scientific understanding that leads to real on ground improvement is what the Recovery Team is all about.

All of these big steps forward have been achieved while working with our staff, Bron and now Kerry, and our volunteers (particularly Felicity Lord, Dick Cooper and Evan Roberts) to maintain our ongoing activities like the Annual Count, the 1800 Freecall sightings number, nest box maintenance, flock counts, regular newsletters and a lot more in between.

It might now become clear to others why I was a little hesitant to take on the position of Recovery Team Chair. It's a big set of boots to be filling!

Tim Burnard

ANNUAL COCKY COUNT – 3 MAY 2014

With another new year comes the chance to get involved in the upcoming annual count for the South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo. This year the count will be held on Saturday 3 May across the cockatoo's range in the South East of South Australia and South-west Victoria.

Volunteers from all walks of life are encouraged to gear up for a day in the bush, searching the stringybark for these somewhat elusive cockatoos. As per previous years volunteer search groups will be allocated one of around sixty sites in stringybark, which they will cover by vehicle, preferably 4WD, to search for the birds. Landholders who have remnant stringybark on their property are also encouraged to search their own property on the day.

Search areas are scattered from Keith to Mount Gambier in South Australia and Nelson to Little Desert National Park in Victoria. You can request a particular area to search when you register, or nominate to search your own property. Almost all of our search sites (except for those searching their own property) will be located on public land. While the Recovery Team encourages volunteers to search all freely accessible habitat for cockatoos, it emphasises that care must be taken not to trespass on private property when searching for birds.

Quite often large flocks are encountered at water troughs located on private property or in other stringybark patches that are inaccessible to our counters. Hence, we really appreciate if landholders who notice birds on their property call in the sighting on the day by phoning 1800 262 062, even if you haven't registered. The same goes for anyone who observes birds on the day.

To register your interest or to find out more information about what's involved or how to become involved please contact Bronwyn Perryman on 1800 262 062 or via email redtail@birdlife.org.au. Registrations are taken up to two weeks prior to the count, with site allocation and a package of instructions (survey kit) sent out in the fortnight leading up to the count.

The count is undertaken annually to help us gain important information on the location of large flocks, patterns of habitat use and the minimum number of birds.

This year we will again run an annual count training session on the morning of the count for those that haven't participated or would like some pointers when searching for Red-tails. Please indicate your interest in attending when registering for the count. Volunteers can also attend the annual Bailey's Rocks Campout on the Saturday night to close out a big day of counting. More information will be available on the website www.redtail.com.au over the coming months.

The success of the count relies heavily on sighting information that we receive in the weeks leading up to the count. If you see Red-tails from now onwards please report all sightings to Freecall 1800 262 062 or via our website www.redtail.com.au.

The Recovery Team looks forward to hearing from both returning and new participants and hopes that we can top last year's tally of 1118 birds. Most of all, we hope our volunteers have an enjoyable day out in the bush with their families and/or friends.

To register your interest or secure your search area for 2014 please contact Bronwyn at your earliest convenience.



Pair of South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos.

Photo Bob McPherson.

NEST BOX MAINTENANCE TIME

Every two years, we check our artificial nest boxes to make sure they are safe (and comfortable) for Red-tails to use. As usual, Evan Roberts volunteered to stand watch and catch me if I should fall from the cherry picker.

We have two types of nest box; large natural wooden hollows cut from fallen trees, and the PVC version that have been made by volunteers. Both boxes need to be checked to ensure that the bases are intact with a bed of woodchip that allows rain to drain through. In the PVC boxes we also have to check that the ladders inside the box are firmly fixed to allow easy access (and exit) by the birds.

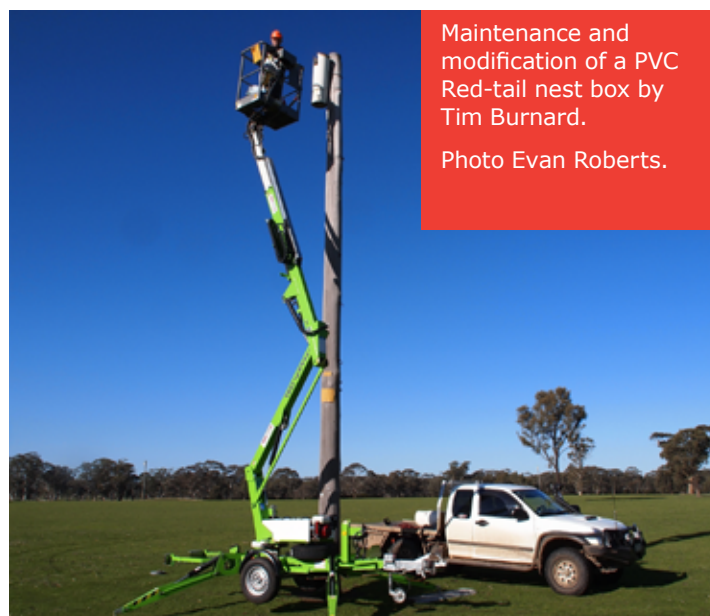
Whilst the natural wooden hollows have always been popular with Red-tails, the PVC boxes have only been seen to be used on one occasion. And when we saw the bird using the nest we came to understand why it might be so rare. Red-tails always land on the nest edge then turn around to back into the hollow. The bird we observed using the PVC box was clearly struggling to perform the manoeuvre in the limited space available on the PVC nest. So another task during this year's maintenance was to alter the design and allow easier access.

We'll be keeping an eye on these boxes in coming years to see if the changes have worked and Red-tails freely use the PVC boxes.

At the moment it's food shortage, not nest site shortage that limits our Red-tail populations, but with all those lovely old trees with hollows slowly falling to the ground, we expect nest

shortage in the future to be a real problem. Finding natural hollows from fallen trees is not as easy as you may think, so understanding just what sort of PVC nest design will work is quite likely to be important in the future.

Tim Burnard



Maintenance and modification of a PVC Red-tail nest box by Tim Burnard.

Photo Evan Roberts.

The beautifully designed Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo Silk Tie by Patrick McMurray.

Photo Patrick



TIES TO SUPPORT COCKY RECOVERY

Patrick McMurray Designers have recently created a beautifully crafted silk tie featuring the iconic Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo. Each tie is 100% designed and handmade in Australia from woven silk. This tie and many more are available for sale on the website www.patrickmcmurray.com. When purchasing, 10% of the sale of each tie will be donated to a charity of the buyer's choice (selected from a list), including BirdLife Australia. All donations directed to BirdLife Australia will be funnelled to the Red-tail Recovery Program and go towards creating a brighter future for our Red-tails.

Patrick McMurray is an established Australian designer brand famous for its distinctive handmade silk ties. On behalf of the Recovery Team and BirdLife Australia we would sincerely like to thank Patrick McMurray Designers for their generous support of the Red-tail recovery program. If you would like to buy or find out more about these beautifully crafted ties please visit www.patrickmcmurray.com.

KOWREE FARM TREE GROUP: THE LAST 12 MONTHS



Planting seedlings at Landback (Minimay) in 2013 by Edenhope Kindergarten. Photo: Iestyn Hosking, Landback Manager.

Bankmecu Landbank

Currently the main activity of the Kowree Farm Tree Group (KFTG) is the management of the bankmecu Landbank properties.

Bankmecu have created the Landbank to offer its customers the option of offsetting biodiversity losses and carbon emissions associated with borrowing money to buy a car or home. In order to achieve those things the land that is purchased must have good biodiversity values and also capable of further improvement by re-establishing native vegetation on cleared land.

Bankmecu landbank consists of three properties; one at Minimay (the largest), the second at Ozenkadnook and the third at Bringalbert. The KFTG works co-operatively with bankmecu, Landcare Australia Ltd and Trust for Nature to manage the Landbank. The KFTG role in this partnership is to physically manage the 1,000 ha holdings.

A significant part of this role includes tree establishment on the agricultural areas. Each year 80ha is planted; 40ha is planted as seedlings by local sporting and community groups and 40 ha is direct-seeded by a contractor. All of the plantings are done with locally collected seed and much of it is contributing to habitat for Red-tailed Cockatoos. Last year 6,800 Stringybarks and 3300 Bulokes were planted.

Bush Stone Curlew

For eighteen months KFTG investigated (with a view to establishing) a Bush Stone Curlew re-introduction program. This work was done by Sue Close. By the time Sue had thoroughly reviewed the literature and been to look at projects run (or attempted) elsewhere, KFTG decided not to go further.

KFTG had set them-selves the following goal: By the year 2022, create a regional population of at least 50 Bush Stone Curlews, in a suitable locality, which would be viable without ongoing human intervention.

The conclusion reached was that it is feasible to establish 50 adult curlews, but impossible to achieve a viable population without ongoing human intervention. The reason? Foxes. Everything else looks ideal for this project to work, but without permanent fox eradication, successful breeding and fledging of curlews will not occur. Unless there is an island available to do this work, there doesn't seem to be an answer to this problem, and so the tiny local population of curlews is doomed to die out within a year or two.

This conclusion was extremely disappointing. In order to salvage something from this project, a thorough report on the research done by Sue (including a collection of other related reports and papers) was put together and is available for anyone else who wants to pursue this activity. It would be fantastic to be proven wrong!

Other

Kowree Farm Tree Group has run two part-time Landcare Facilitators and since June, one.

For three years KFTG was a partner with Trust for Nature in a Caring for Our Country (CfoC) funded Buloke conservation project, which also ended in June.

KFTG has worked with Greening Australia to encourage conservation planning and other co-operative conservation activity for the Habitat 141 Southwest Wimmera Zone. This work is ongoing and more will be done in the next few weeks and months.

For more, see the Kowree Farm Tree Group website: www.kowreefarmtreegroup.com

Andrew Bradey



Kerry Gilkes and Naracoorte South Primary School students planting stringybark seed as part of the schools Red-tail stringybark habitat propagation and nursery project.

Photo: Naracoorte Herald.

MORE FUNDING FOR 'KIDS HELPING COCKIES' PROJECT

The Recovery Team and BirdLife Australia have secured more funds to extend the 'Kids helping cockies' program over 2013-14 to continue its work with local schools to grow stringybark for Red-tails.

In May 2013 BirdLife Australia and the Recovery Team applied for a second South Australian Natural Resource Management (SA NRM) Community Grant to continue its work with local schools to grow stringybark for Red-tails as part of the highly successful 'Kids helping Cockies' Project. This year the project was successful in receiving a total of \$17,870 through the annual State grant program for 2013-14.

The 'extending the kids helping cockies project' will continue to support and advise six regional schools that committed to the nursery program in 2012-13. The schools will develop and establish their own school nurseries, to grow stringybark seedlings for localised habitat restoration projects in the South East of SA. Participating schools include Lucindale Area School, Naracoorte South Primary School, Naracoorte Primary School, Nangwarry Primary School, Glenburnie Primary School and Tenison Woods College. All six schools were successful recipients of either a SA NRM Community Grant or SE NRM Regional Grant to establish their own fully functional nursery over 2013-14.

Red-tail staff will support each school by providing ongoing advice and assistance with nursery establishment and germination techniques, seed collection and planting of tube stock. Teachers and students will also be accompanied by our staff on field excursions to plant tube stock at local sites across the South East.

The project will also deliver in-class presentations to an additional 14 schools; with the aim of identifying a further two schools to participate and commit to establishing a school nursery program in 2014-15. Presentations will focus on the needs of Red-tails and provide teachers and students with a basic introduction to seed growing techniques for stringybark.

It is anticipated that the additional two schools identified through this project will grow and supply seedlings to future revegetation projects in the region. Staff will facilitate this by assisting with the preparation of nursery plans and funding applications through next year's State NRM grants.

Participation in this project will not only provide students with an understanding of Red-tails and their needs, but will also provide a 'hands on' approach to the conservation and restoration of the cockatoo's important stringybark habitat through the propagation process.

For more information about the project or how your school can become involved please contact the Project Coordinator on 1800 262 062 or by emailing redtail@birdlife.org.au

ELECTRONIC NEWSLETTER

We encourage you to receive Red-tail News electronically, as this lightens our workload and saves precious resources. Please email redtail@birdlife.org.au if you are keen to receive the electronic version.

1500+ TREES FOR RED-TAILS

Background

In early December last year seventy six students from Tenison Woods College in Mount Gambier spent a good part of the morning potting over 1500 tubes as part of the school's latest project to help re-create habitat for one of the region's most endangered birds, the South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo.

Last August Tenison Woods College was successful in obtaining funding through the SA NRM Community Grant Program to assist with the establishment of a fully functional school nursery to grow stringybark trees for local Red-tail revegetation projects.

The project, supported by BirdLife Australia, builds on previous small-scale propagation work, and provides school children with a hands-on approach to conservation and recovery activities for the endangered cockatoo. Students are given the opportunity to become involved in all aspects of the propagation and restoration process from seed collection, planting seeds, growing seedlings, and planting out germinated seedlings on site.

Grant funding has now allowed two large galvanised mesh propagating tables and a watering system to be installed within close proximity to the student's classroom. At present, the nursery area can support the propagation of up to 2000 trees.

Teachers, Tina Opperman, Francesca Dickson, Monika Kolhoffer and Kirsty Clifford have been extremely enthusiastic and supportive of the project and its development since our first visit to the school back in 2012. Tina and Francesca have been particularly instrumental in driving the project within the school and are thrilled to see the nursery take shape.

Aside from growing much needed food for Red-tails, this project provides a fun and interactive way for students to learn and gain an appreciation for not only Red-tails and their habitat, but for conservation as a whole.

A 'hands-on' approach to seed collection and planting

Due to the logistics of taking 76 students into the bush to collect seed from stringybark trees, we decided to re-enact the seed collection process within the classroom environment. Students collected fruit (seed capsules) from branches brought into the classroom, and placed them in labelled brown paper bags. The paper bags were then taped to the classroom windows to hasten the release of seed from capsules.

Over a week later students planted their very own seed consisting of a mix of Brown Stringybark, Messmate Stringybark, Manna gum, She-oak and Tea-tree. Over 1500 tubes were potted and planted with seed in just over two hours.

The students showed great enthusiasm towards the project, supporting one another to fill tubes with native seed raising mix, plant seeds, organise and label seed trays, and water tubes. As always there were lots of questions, confirming the students' interest and willingness to learn more about the propagating process.

Over the next six months germinated seedlings will be cared for by the students, with all germinated seedlings to be planted out at several landholders properties in winter 2014.

If you would like to know more about how your school could become involved in re-creating a better future for Red-tails, please contact Bronwyn Perryman on 1800 262 062 or email redtail@birdlife.org.au



Tenison Woods College Students potting and planting seeds in over 1500 tubes as part of their school's SERTBC habitat propagation project.
Photos Bronwyn Perryman



WHERE ARE THE KEITH COCKIES?

Recently, Michelle Duong, a student from the University of Queensland, set about the huge task of collating all of the sighting data for Red-tails to prepare a new and updated range map for the species. The updated draft map highlights 100% and 99% of Red-tail sightings, with all extreme outliers excluded. Of particular interest is the lack or absence of records of birds between Bordertown and Keith (see draft map). There are a number of records of birds North East of Keith, but no reports or records of birds between there and Bordertown.

While Red-tails are not commonly encountered around Keith, the Recovery Team agree that the absence of records between the two towns is probably more of a result of poor recording rather than an absence of cockatoos.

As such we are particularly interested to hear from residents or local landholders who see or have sighted birds in this area. Reporting a sighting is easy. Simply phone freecall 1800 262 062, email redtail@birdlife.org.au or report your sighting via the website www.redtail.com.au.

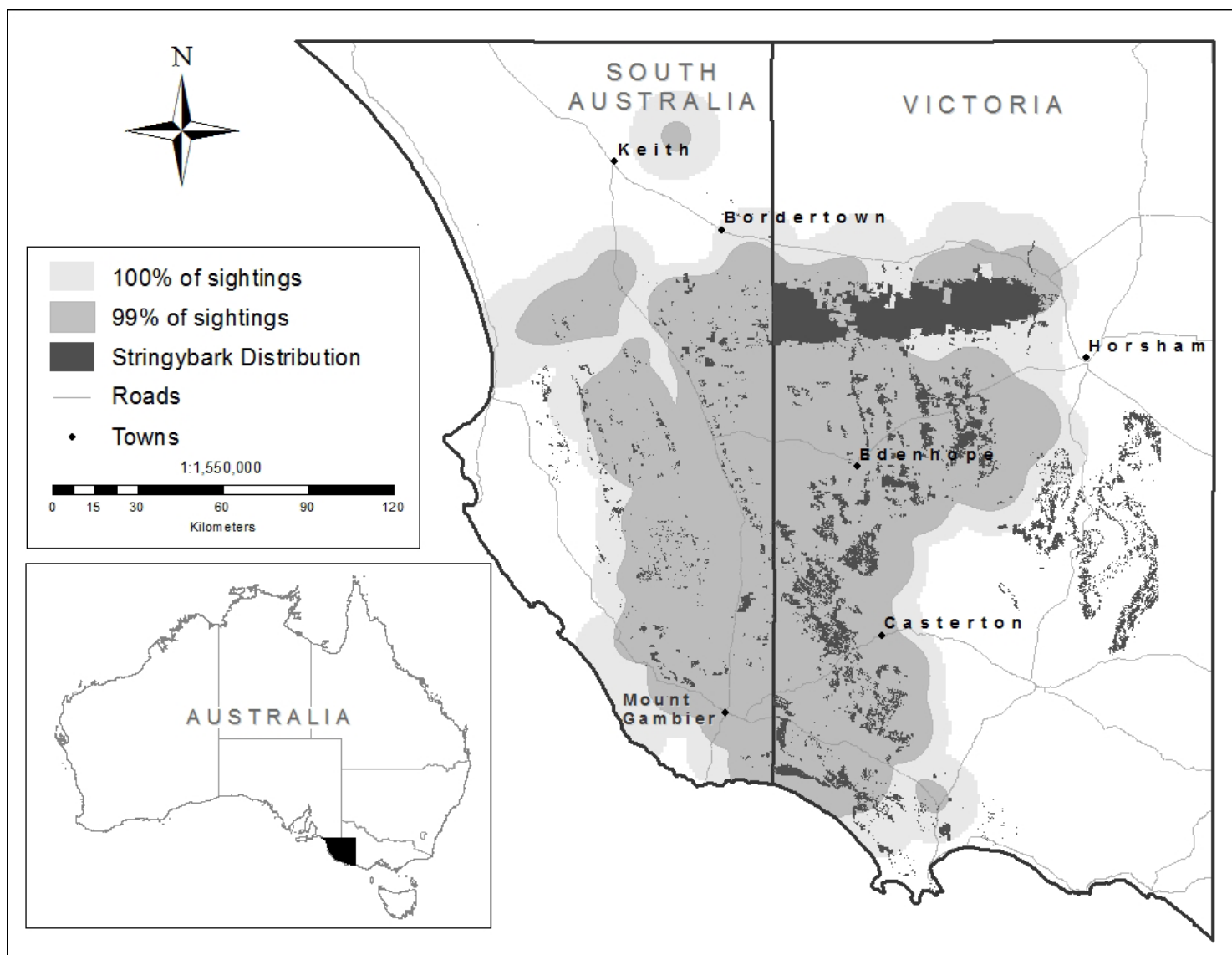
We accept all credible sighting reports, so even if you are not in the area please continue to pass on your sightings to the Team. When reporting a sighting please remember to include: date and time, place (CFS/CFA map reference is appreciated), how many birds, what they were doing (i.e. feeding in stringybark, flying, nesting etc) and your name and phone number/email.

SOUTH EAST FIELD DAYS 2014 - MARCH 21 & 22

The South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo Recovery Project will again be attending the 36th Annual South East Field Days at Lucindale on the 21 & 22 March 2014. Project staff, volunteers and recovery team members will be available on the day to answer any questions you may have about the cockatoo and its recovery. Visitors to the site will have the opportunity to learn more about Red-tails through our interpretative displays and how they can become involved in recovery activities for the cockatoo, such as the 2014 annual cocky count.

This year you will find us at our usual site (383) on Wilson Street. Just look for our flying Red-tail Flags. We will also be showcasing all of our coin competition winner's artwork and handing out information booklets, balloons and stickers for the kids. Red-tail kites will also be again available for purchase at a cost of \$20 each.

We look forward to seeing you there.



The new draft range map for the South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo. Image Michelle Duong.

RED TAILS TO BENEFIT FROM LANDSCAPE LINKS CORRIDOR PROJECT

A new corridors project called 'Landscape Links' will focus on habitat restoration for woodland birds in the Bangham district in the Upper South East of South Australia.

The Bangham district has more native habitat than many other parts of the south east and recent bird surveys have revealed that it is an important area for the Red-tail and many other woodland bird species.

Remnant patches of bushland support a diverse array of woodland birds. However, fragmentation of these patches is a major contributor to declines in woodland bird species throughout south eastern Australia.

The Landscape Links Bangham corridor will help to link these islands of bushland and help to create habitat for woodland birds and other wildlife. Although corridors are nothing new, Landscape Links aims to create large 100m wide corridors featuring diverse species and habitat types.

The focus of this project is reinstatement of South Australian blue gum (*Eucalyptus leucoxylon*) woodlands and Stringybark woodland. This landscape scale restoration project will benefit many woodland bird species and also help to secure future food resources and nesting habitat for Red-tails.

Project Officer Cassie Hlava, is encouraging landholders to get involved and to help secure populations of woodland birds including the Red-tail. Landscape Links will compensate farmers for lost production as well as covering initial fencing and revegetation costs.

To obtain further information or to register your interest please contact Cassie Hlava 87351169 or Cassandra.hlava@sa.gov.au. This project is funded by the Australian Government Biodiversity Fund and is delivered by Natural Resources South East.

Cassie Hlava

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