

# Red-tail News

Issue 40 March 2015

## WELCOME

Welcome to the 2015 Autumn Edition of Red-tail News.

Edition 40 of RTN brings to you a collection of news stories covering the 2015 annual count, results of the long term phenology study, Australian Geographic's 'Threatened Black-

Cockatoo' appeal, nest incentives update, investigating illegal clearance, a new factsheet for establishment of paddock tree plantings plus much much more.

*Bronwyn Perryman*

## PORTLAND NORTH PRIMARY EMBARKS ON RED-TAIL REVEGETATION PROJECT



Stringybark seedlings grown by Portland North Primary School Students.  
Image: Mel Holtz

Last November students from Portland North Primary School participated in an in-classroom seed collection activity to collect seed for a school revegetation project for Red-tails.

Students were given a brief introduction to the endangered cockatoo, its food and nest trees, the main threats to its survival and what actions volunteers, farmers and organisations can take to help reduce the rate of decline.

Students also learnt about the basics of seed collection, including how and what type of seed to collect and the importance of collecting seed locally (collecting seed that is endemic to the local area where the revegetation will take place).

The level of interest and engagement shown by the students throughout the discussion was extremely pleasing, with many students keen to share their existing knowledge, stories and sightings of the cockatoo.

The second part of the exercise involved the students collecting the fruit or seed capsules from branches of brown stringybark, collected from Cobboboonee Forest Park the previous day, and placing these into brown paper bags. Students labelled their bags with their name, date collected, species name (Brown Stringybark - *Eucalyptus baxteri*), and the area where the seed was collected. These were then hung near the window to encourage the fruit capsules to open and the seed to fall out.

Seed collected from the fruit has since been planted in seedling trays, with grown seedlings to be later planted out around the school boundary as part of a small revegetation project. In doing this, the students will be creating a future food resource for the cockatoo.

For more information on how your school can become involved in school revegetation projects for Red-tails please contact Bronwyn Perryman on 1800 262 062 or email [redtail@birdlife.org.au](mailto:redtail@birdlife.org.au).

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*Flock of Red-tails drinking at a trough near Powers Creek. Image Rachel Farran*

## CALLING COCKY COUNTERS FOR 2015 ANNUAL COUNT

The South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo Recovery Team and BirdLife Australia are again seeking volunteers to assist with the 2015 range-wide annual count for our endangered South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos.

This year the count will be held on Saturday 2 May across the cockatoo's range in the South East of South Australia and South-west Victoria.

There are around sixty sites scattered in stringybark forest from Keith to Mount Gambier in South Australia and Nelson to Little Desert National Park in Victoria to be searched on the day. Volunteer search groups will cover their allocated site via vehicle, preferably 4WD, using one of two methods (scientific or drive in the park) to search of the cockatoos.

A large area of the cockatoo's preferred stringybark habitat is located on private land. Hence, we encourage all landholders who have remnant stringybark to search their own property(s) on the day. Volunteers can elect to search a particular area or nominate to search their own properties when registering.

Red-tails often use watering points such as cattle troughs and stringybark habitat that is inaccessible to our counters. As such, we encourage all landholders or anyone who notices birds on the day to phone in their sighting(s) to freecall 1800 262 026.

The annual count is used to gain information on the location of large flocks, patterns of habitat use and the minimum number of cockatoos in the wild. It also raises awareness of the specialised needs of the bird and builds community knowledge and capacity to become involved in recovery efforts.

An annual count training session will again be held on the morning of the count for those who haven't participated or would like more information about the best ways in which to locate Red-tails. We would appreciate if you could register your interest in attending upon registration.

Volunteers are also welcome to attend the annual Bailey's Rock Campout to close out a big day's counting. This is an informal campout for volunteers to share stories and tales of the day's adventure with others involved in the day.

To register your interest or to find out more information about what's involved please contact Bronwyn Perryman on 1800 262 062 or via email [redtail@birdlife.org.au](mailto:redtail@birdlife.org.au) or visit our website [www.redtail.com.au](http://www.redtail.com.au).

Registrations are taken up to two weeks prior to the count;

however we highly recommend registering well before to secure your preferred search area. A package of survey instructions and map will be sent out to registered volunteers in the fortnight leading up to the count.

The success of the count relies heavily on sighting information that we receive in the months 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](http://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 1064 birds. Most of all, we hope our volunteers have an enjoyable day out in the stringybark with families and friends.



*SE Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos use their left foot almost exclusively to feed. Image: Steve Bourne*





Paddock stringybarks, like the one pictured above, often produce far greater seed crops than stringybark trees within patches.

## Paddock Tree Plantings for Red-Tails

Scattered paddock trees provide important habitat to a wide range of native wildlife including our Red-tails. These trees not only provide important nesting habitat, but can also provide a highly valuable food resource for the cockatoo. For example, stringybark paddock trees have been found to produce up to 26 times more seed than stringybark trees within patches. Similarly scattered paddock buloke also provides an important seasonal food supply for this species.

However, paddock trees are becoming increasingly vulnerable to clearance due to a shift to more intense agricultural practises including large scale cropping, installation of centre pivot irrigation systems and stubble burning. Remaining paddock trees are also at risk of decline due to damage from stock through ringbarking and soil compaction.

While many revegetation programs focus on the establishment of corridors or small patches of vegetation another way for landholders to create ideal habitat for Red-tails, without compromising productivity, is to plant trees in a scattered pattern.

## 10 Amazing Facts About Red-Tails

Did you know that all SERTBC's are left footed, or that our sub-species of Red-tail are the brightest of all the five sub-species?

Since 2009 we have been proudly handing out a little booklet called '10 amazing things about Red-tails'. The booklet, which provides a great summary of information and facts about Red-tail behaviour and ecology, has been a popular handout at field day events for farmers, kids and the general public alike.

Given its popularity, it was decided that a second edition of the booklet was necessary to update and reflect our latest knowledge and thinking. Author Tim Burnard, has recently completed the revision with 2500 copies printed thanks to funding provided by the Kowree Farm Tree Group.

The new edition will be available online and at all upcoming field day events. The Recovery Team and BirdLife Australia would like to extend a big thank you to the Kowree Farm Tree Group for their generous support.

To request a copy please contact the Project Coordinator on 1800 262 062 or email [redtail@birdlife.org.au](mailto:redtail@birdlife.org.au).

Creating a paddock tree effect not only provides additional habitat for local native fauna, but also offers potential benefits to landholders through increased farm productivity. Scattered paddock trees can provide shelter to stock and attract insect controlling micro-bats that can provide a natural means of pest control.

To encourage and assist landholders to undertake scattered tree plantings Tim Burnard from the SERTBC Recovery Team has developed a new, easy to read factsheet, which provides information on how to create a paddock tree effect ideal for Red-tails. The factsheet offers a guide to establishment and spacing of paddock trees and information on how to protect newly established plantings from stock.

To download a copy of the factsheet please follow the link <http://www.redtail.com.au/uploads/Scattered%20tree%20fact%20sheet%2012-2-15.pdf>.

For more information on scattered tree plantings or to discuss your individual Red-tail habitat restoration requirements please contact the Project Coordinator on 1800 262 062 or email [redtail@birdlife.org.au](mailto:redtail@birdlife.org.au).

Although it may not be the cheapest method of tree establishment, scattered tree plantings established today will help to provide an important food bank for Red-tails into the future.





## CASH FOR COCKIES

Each year the Australian Geographic Society runs six fundraising appeals for endangered, threatened or iconic species and/or their habitats. These appeals are run over a two month period in conjunction with Australian Geographic Retail Stores, with 'Threatened Black-Cockatoos' to feature as the next big campaign.

Of the black-cockatoos targeted, as part of the fundraiser, is our very own South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo. The SERTBC has a limited range, occurring only in the South East of South Australia and South West Victoria. The critically small population of around 1500 individuals is at risk of extinction from the ongoing loss and decline of the cockatoo's key habitats.

## NEST INCENTIVES UPDATE

Over the past four years the Red-tail Recovery Team together with BirdLife Australia have been working hard with the community to find new nest sites of the SE Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo through the Red-tail Nest Incentive Program.

The program, which offers incentives to landholders and members of the public for the discovery of new nest sites of the cockatoo, has had some great success with a total of 14 new nest sites having been discovered since its launch back in July 2011.

This year, however, has been very unsuccessful with very few reports and unfortunately no new nests found over the 2014-15 breeding season. It is unsure exactly as to why this was the case, however the lack of food (as identified through the nut counting study) may be partly to blame.

Past research has shown that the best predictor of a year with low breeding success is food availability over the preceding three years. Hence, birds are unlikely to breed and/or nests are more likely to fail in years with less food.

There have been some reports of juveniles over the breeding season, however it won't be until we complete our annual flock counts that we can comment or draw some conclusions about the success of the latest breeding season.

It could be that birds were dispersed more widely across the range this breeding season and/or in more remote parts of the range where the likelihood of detecting nests is far lower.

Over the last 17 years the SERTBC Recovery Team together with BirdLife Australia has been working hard to slow the rate of decline through the implementation of a dedicated recovery program. The program, which monitors population patterns, minimises key threats and builds community knowledge and capacity to help improve habitat conditions for the species, is set to benefit from the appeal, with Australian Geographic donating half of the funds raised to the recovery project.

The Kaarakin Black-Cockatoo Conservation Centre will also be supported with the remaining half of all funds raised going towards rehabilitation and recovery of some of WA's most threatened Black-Cockatoos including Baudin's and Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos and the Forest sub-species of Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo.

The appeal will run over March and April 2015 with the fundraiser publicised in the current edition of the Australian Geographic Journal, through promotion on the Australian Geographic website and across 60 Australian Geographic retail stores around Australia.

Supporters can elect to donate online by following the link <http://www.australiangeographic.com.au/society/fundraising/2015/02/save-our-native-cockatoos> or in-store through a donations box or via the register. Kids who donate spare change will receive a fantastic Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo magnet as pictured.

The Recovery Team and BirdLife Australia would sincerely like to thank the Australian Geographic Society for this wonderful offer of support to the recovery program, Red-tails and to all threatened Black-Cockatoos across Australia.

With less than 1500 birds remaining in the wild the SERTBC is a species worthy of selection.

For more information about the fundraiser or the Australian Geographic Society please visit their website <http://www.australiangeographic.com.au/society>.

So get donating now to create a brighter future for our threatened Black-Cockatoos!

It is important to note that Red-tails can breed year round depending on conditions. Anyone who observes nesting behaviour is encouraged to report their observations to the Project Coordinator on 1800 262 062.

For more information on nesting behaviour or the nest incentives program please visit the website [www.redtail.com.au](http://www.redtail.com.au).



*Female SE Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo at entrance to nest hollow.  
Image: Bob McPherson*

## INVESTIGATING ILLEGAL CLEARANCE

A key threat to the South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo is the removal of the cockatoo's critical feeding and nesting habitats. Over half of the historic stringybark habitat and more than 97% of buloke woodlands have been cleared since pre-European settlement.

Stringybark and buloke feed trees, and large hollow bearing eucalypts that provide nesting habitat are all subject to continued loss.

A large area of the cockatoo's habitat is located on private land, where competing land uses motivate permitted and illegal clearances of habitat. A shift to more intense cropping regimes, using centre pivot irrigation or GPS guided machinery, has led to the removal of scattered trees from paddocks that were historically grazed or subject to less intensive cropping practices.

The ongoing loss of scattered paddock trees, which provide important nesting and feeding habitat for the cockatoo, is particularly worrying. Paddock stringybark trees have been found to produce up to 26 times more seed than stringybark trees within patches (Maron et al. 2008) highlighting their importance as key food resource for this species.

Analysis of aerial imagery to assess and detect changes in vegetation cover in the Wimmera Region between 2004 and 2009 found around 20% of paddock trees were lost per annum, mainly as a result of human-induced clearance. Most of the trees removed were buloke, which are highly valuable to Red-tails. Clearance was found to be directly related to land-use and more prominent in cropping areas where, aside from bull dozing, trees are often at risk of loss through stubble burning practices.

Of greatest concern is that much of the clearance detected was non-permitted and therefore illegal. Clearing of native vegetation without approval from the relevant authority can attract heavy fines and even result in criminal proceedings.

The SERTBC Recovery Team is interested to replicate the analysis of aerial imagery across other parts of the birds range to:

1. gain a better understanding of how stringybark paddock tree extent has changed over time,
2. identify if this level of clearance is happening elsewhere and
3. identify and detect instances of illegal clearance and potential hotspots for further investigation.

The Recovery Team is currently pursuing options to undertake this work and encourages anyone who knows of or observes any suspected unauthorised clearance to report it to the Native Vegetation Investigation and Compliance Unit in SA on 08 8124 4914 or the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning in Victoria on 136 186.

## FEEDING IN BULOKE

During summer and autumn flocks of Red-tails will often move to the northern part of the range to feed on buloke. Unlike stringybark, buloke does not retain the seed in the capsule and thus is only available to the birds from January to March. The quantity of seed produced by bulokes each year is highly variable – some years they produce a large seed crop other years fruiting may be very minimal.

Buloke woodlands have been extensively cleared, mainly because they occur on heavier, more fertile rich soils most suited for agriculture. Much of that remaining consists of scattered paddock trees which often produce far greater seed crops than those in patches. These trees are highly valuable to Red-tails, but are often the most vulnerable to damage by stock and removal for cropping.

Buloke is very slow growing taking around 100 years to reach 19 cms in diameter. It is often only then that buloke becomes suitable as feeding habitat for Red-tails. Many of the trees that Red-tails are seen feeding on are over 200 years of age.

Mature bulokes are more preferred over smaller, immature trees mainly because they produce a heavier seed crop and have larger, stronger branches that are able to better sustain the cockatoo's weight whilst feeding. Young bulokes have smaller, flimsy branches which tend to wobble under the weight of the bird when trying to feed. Note - it's a tough gig holding your entire weight on one foot whilst eating with the other!

This year, Red-tails were observed feeding in buloke earlier than normal, perhaps because of an unusually dry spring. The first reports of birds in buloke were within the first week of January by Recovery Team member and landholder Evan Roberts. These birds were seen feeding along the Hynam-Frances Road, near Binnun. Another hotspot for birds in buloke this year was the Frances Cemetery, where Red-tails were reported feeding on a number of occasions.

Although fruiting occurred earlier this year, it was very short lived with much of the buloke finished seeding by the end

of February. The seed crop produced was also small, again presumably because of the very little rain over winter and spring 2014. Let's hope next year's fruiting is a better success.

For more information about establishing buloke on your property please refer to our factsheet 'How to plant buloke from scratch' on our website <http://www.redtail.com.au/uploads/file/latestnews/Bulokefactsheet.pdf>.



*Scattered paddock bulokes provide highly valuable feeding habitat to Red-tails, but are often the most vulnerable to removal for cropping.*

*Image: Martine Maron*





A recent crop of stringybark seed.

Image: Tim Burnard

## COUNTING NUTS

We know that Red-tails are absolutely dependant on the fruit from the two types of local stringybarks (Desert and Brown stringybark). Red-tails also eat from buloke but it's the stringybarks that provide year round food (buloke only has seed available for a couple of months a year). Some time ago the Recovery Team recognised that we need to know more about the fruiting behaviour of these important trees.

We have just completed year 7 of a 10 year study and already the findings have been used in research that has made a definite link between breeding success and food availability (see the article in Mar 2013 newsletter titled 'Hungry Cockies Don't Breed'). We expect even more use for this data in the coming years.

Our study aims to gain an understanding of the relative productivity of stringybarks on a yearly basis, in different parts of the Red-tail range. This will highlight differences in the timing of seed production between the two stringybark species, identify years of high and low food availability and might enable us to predict where Red-tails are likely to turn up next.

Measurement of stringybark productivity needs to be measurable and repeatable, but not necessarily highly accurate. So what we have done is establish 10 sites from the Lower Glenelg National Park in the south up to Padthaway in the north. Each site is long unburnt because we know that scorched stringybark produces less food than unburnt stringybark. At each site we have tagged 20 trees and each year we measure the amount of fresh food for Red-tails. When we say fresh food, we are talking about the most recent crop of fruit which is far easier to eat and more nutritious than older dry brown fruit. We do the survey in Nov-Jan, when the fruits have just finished maturing and are bright green and easily distinguished from the brown or grey fruits that are one or more years old. There's a lot of binocular work and I normally get a sore neck by the time I've measured the 200th tree!

After 7 years of measurements it is a bit alarming to note that this year, virtually no 'bright green' fruit was observed at any of the 10 sites. There was some brown fruit seen near the end of branches (suggesting a more recent crop), but

within these fruit there were often some with open vents (suggesting an older crop). I also noted that some trees had emerging buds of two ages, maybe a month or more apart. All of this was a bit unusual and may be as a result of limited rainfall in winter and spring of 2014.

On the upside I noted that this year's budding was greater than normal (maybe a result of summer rains?). The causes for this odd fruiting can only be speculated at this time. The reason we run a long term study is so that we can look at data from many years and start to draw some solid conclusions.

Given that the stringybark fruit available is in the shortest supply in seven years of surveying, it was also interesting to note that birds have been feeding in buloke earlier than usual, there has been a rare sighting of the species near Cavendish (well outside the normal range) and that no new nests were found over the recent breeding season. All of these are indicators of an endangered species in trouble. It will be very interesting to see the results from our flock counts in May to get an understanding of this year's breeding success.

Tim Burnard

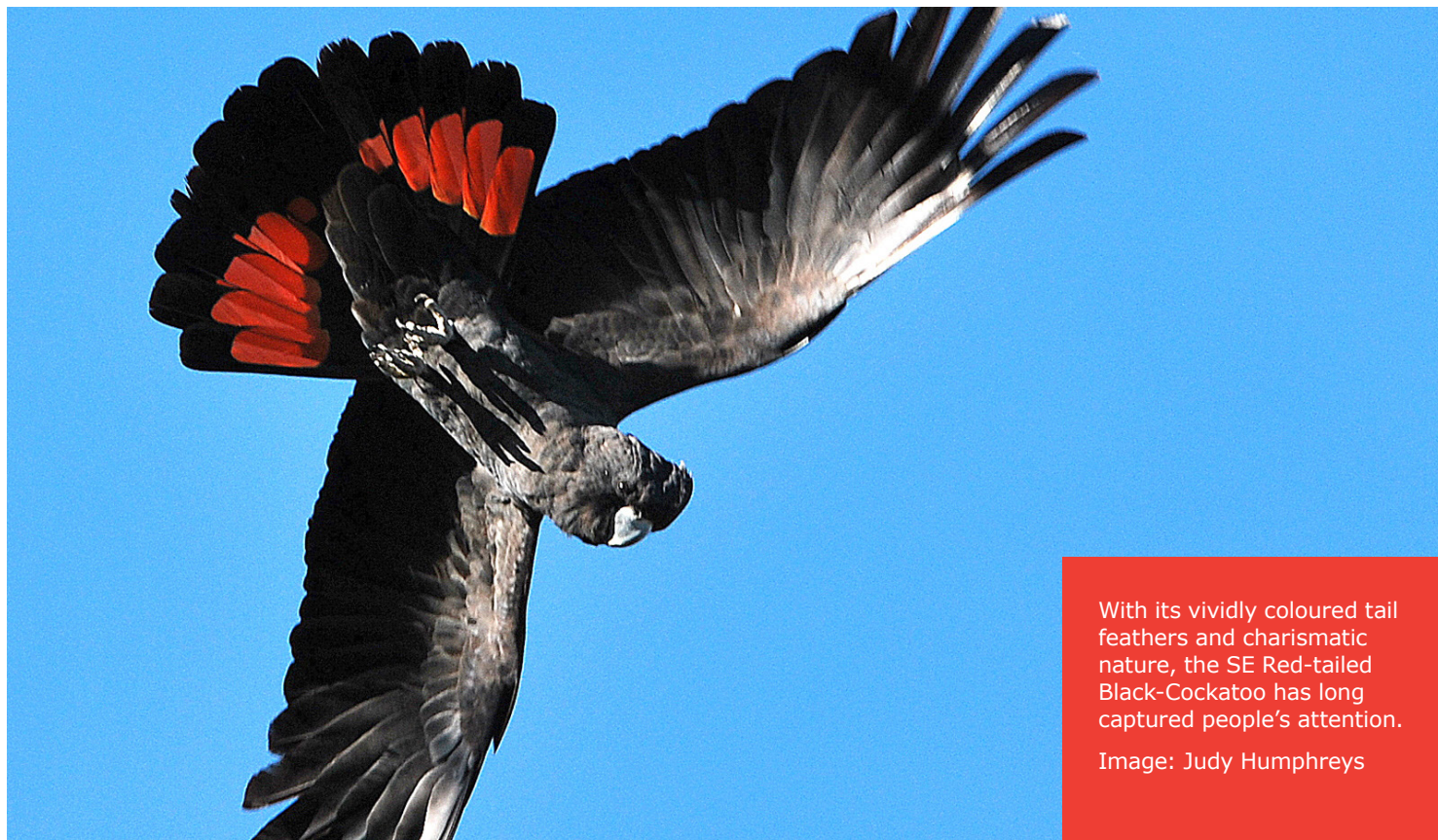
## RED-TAIL IMAGES

The Red-tail Recovery Project is always interested in receiving new photographs and images of SE Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos for use on the website and when developing promotional material. If you have any images that you wish to share please contact Bronwyn on 1800 262 062 or email your images to [redtail@bidlife.org.au](mailto:redtail@bidlife.org.au). All images used will be credited accordingly.



Pair of SE Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos.  
Image: Bob McPherson





With its vividly coloured tail feathers and charismatic nature, the SE Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo has long captured people's attention.

Image: Judy Humphreys

## RED-TAIL INSPIRED POETRY

In 2013 we held a Red-tail art and story competition where readers were given the opportunity to win some great prizes including one of four beautiful crafted Red-tail Black-Cockatoo Commemorative Coins, six Red-tail Black-Cockatoo Kites and a beautiful bottle of 2010 Coonawarra Cabernet Black-Cocky Wine.

Of the winners, Gloria Freeman, a long-time volunteer Red-tail counter, submitted a delightful poem about Red-tails that I have wanted to share with our readers for quite some time. I hope you enjoy as much as I did.

A big thank you to Gloria for allowing me to share.

### Red-tails

Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos are endangered and rare  
They're now protected which shows that we care.  
Females have orange, yellow and red on their tails  
While large vertical patches of red have the males.

Both of them are mostly black  
And the call they make is "Karak".  
In buloke and stringybark trees they feed  
Cracking and eating hundreds of seeds.  
Mostly they eat stringybark  
Happily feeding until it gets dark.  
Flashes of red can be seen when they fly  
Causing people to stop and watch them fly by.

Hollow trees is where they nest  
Walking in backwards is what they do best.  
Breeding pairs lay one egg per year  
Making it hard to increase I fear.  
We need to save their nesting trees  
For their survival, this is the key  
People need more education  
To improve the Red-tails situation  
Red-tails need us to care  
So they'll still be around for all to share.

*Gloria Freeman - Edenhope College*



Scattered paddock Red-Gum's (dead and live) with large hollows close to stringybark feeding habitat provide ideal nesting habitat for Red-tails.

Image: Tim Burnard

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