

Red-tail News

Issue 48 April 2019



Photo: Michael Waters

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WELCOME TO EDITION 48 OF RED-TAIL NEWS.

Welcome to the first Edition of Red-tail News for 2019. I'd like to start this edition by introducing myself. I'm Kelsey Bennett, the new coordinator for the South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo Recovery Project. As most of you would have read in the previous newsletter Bronwyn Perryman has stepped away from the role after nine years to focus on a teaching degree and raising her young family. She will also continue to deliver the 'Kids helping Cockies' program one day per week, so we can expect more newsletter articles from Bron in the future.

I hope to continue the fantastic legacy that Bron has left behind in this project, and I can't thank her enough for all her help in making the transition process as smooth as possible. We wish Bron all the best in her future and with her studies to become a teacher!

Prior to starting in the coordinator role I worked as a Bush for Life Field Officer with Trees for Life in Adelaide, and also as a seasonal firefighter with DEW in the Mount Lofty Ranges. I have worked extensively with volunteers and private landholders conducting bush regeneration activities such as weed control and revegetation. I developed my passion for birdwatching during university and have become a keen birdwatcher since. I have greatly enjoyed the role so far and look forward to working hard to deliver this fantastic project to create a brighter future for our Cockies!

In this edition of Red-tail News we will hear from new project partner Trees for Life about their involvement with the Red-tail Recovery Project, the Kowree Farm Tree Group and the progress of their Scattered Paddock Tree project, and Paul Koch who has been researching feeding habitat quality of stringybark trees.

We will also hear from Bron who has been busy with the 'Kids helping Cockies' project including a very exciting day filming a news story for the ABC.

We are also looking for volunteers for the upcoming 2019 Annual Count held on Saturday 4th May this year. It is simple to join the count, simply contact myself on 1800 262 062 or redtail@birdlife.org.au. More details are provided in the newsletter.

Thanks, Kelsey



JOIN US FOR THE 2019 ANNUAL COUNT



A flock of flying Red-tails. Photo: Luke Leddy

The Recovery Team and BirdLife Australia are again seeking volunteers for the 2019 Annual Count for the Red-tailed Black Cockatoo. This year the 2019 Annual Count will be conducted on Saturday 4th May.

The Recovery Team is hoping for a good number of volunteers to assist in locating as many flocks as possible across South-eastern South Australia and South-western Victoria. The count will take place in more than 60 sites of stringybark forest ranging between Keith and Mount Gambier in SA, to Nelson and Little Desert National Park in Victoria.

Participating in the count is simple: all you need is a partner/friend or group, binoculars, a love of the outdoors and a vehicle, preferably 4WD. Volunteers will be allocated a site to cover via vehicle, looking and listening out for the distinctive 'karak-karak' call of the cockatoo.

Volunteers need no prior experience for surveying the birds, but are required to become familiar with what the Cockies look and sound like to be able to tell the difference between the Red-tails and Yellow-tails. These birds are often mistaken for each other, and to hear the difference between the two head to our website at www.redtail.com.au.

Landholders with stringybark on their property are also encouraged to search their own property. You can request a particular area to search when you register or nominate to search your own property.

Red-tails regularly use stock troughs as watering points and feed in stringybark trees on private land. These areas are usually inaccessible to our counters so we strongly encourage landholders (and other community members) to report sightings on the day.

The most important reason for conducting the annual count each year is to identify large flocks across the range. Flock counts are then conducted following the annual count using the location of these large flocks to gain an indication of breeding success in previous years.

The annual count also helps us understand how the Red-tails use their habitat, as well as reminding the community to be on the lookout for these special birds.

An annual count training session will be held the morning of the count in Casterton for those who need some tips on how to find birds, or those who haven't participated in the count before. This session is a great way to learn what Red-tails look and sound like, how to identify signs of feeding, and how to tell apart stringybark habitat from other gum woodland habitats.

Following the count, volunteers have the option to attend the annual Bailey's Rocks BBQ and Campout. This is very informal; bring your own food, tent and camping gear, and it is a great way to catch up with other volunteers and swap stories about Red-tail sightings.

To register your interest or find out more information please contact Kelsey Bennett on 1800 262 062 or via email redtail@birdlife.org.au.

Registrations are taken up to two weeks prior to the count; however we highly recommend registering well before the deadline to secure your preferred search area. A package of survey instructions and a map will be sent out to registered volunteers in the fortnight leading up to the count.

We hope you can join us on Saturday May 4th. For those of you who are familiar with Star Wars fandom this date will be an easy one to remember, thanks to the popular phrase 'May the Fourth be with you'. Hopefully the 'Force' will be with us on the day and assist us in counting the cockies! Although we can't ever guarantee you'll see a Red-tail on the day we're sure you'll enjoy a fun day out in the bush searching for our colourful cockatoos.

Kelsey Bennett

REPORT YOUR COCKY SIGHTINGS

The Recovery Team is again urging all members of the public to report any sightings of the endangered South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo in preparation for the 2019 Annual Count.

During this time of year we call upon landholders and the public to report all sightings of Red-tails to assist us in determining where the cockies are currently located, so we can count as many as possible on the day.

Pre-count sighting information helps us situate volunteers strategically on the day in areas where we know birds have been seen recently.

We are especially interested in reports of Red-tails drinking at troughs or dams, as generally this is where we tend to count larger numbers of birds.

We rely heavily on pre-count sighting information to ensure the greatest success for the count. If you see any Red-tails between now and early May, please get in contact and let us know. It will make all the difference to the count, call us on freecall 1800 262 062 or get in touch via the website www.redtail.com.au.

When reporting a sighting, if possible please include your contact details, the date and time of the sighting, an estimate of the number of Red-tails observed, the location and grid reference for the sighting and some information about what behaviour you have observed the birds doing eg drinking from trough, feeding.

We look forward to receiving your reports!

UNDERSTANDING DRIVERS OF FEEDING HABITAT QUALITY

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) are currently undertaking a strategic bushfire risk assessment for the South West region of Victoria, aiming to identify priority areas for fuel management to reduce risk to life and property and provide improved outcomes for environmental values such as the SERTBC. As part of this process, they provided funding for a research study to improve our understanding of the drivers of feeding habitat productivity, which could assist fire planning by spatially targeting burns in order to reduce impacts on SERTBC habitat quality.

The stringybark of the region occurs on low sand dunes over a range of different soil types including heavy clay. The sand dunes vary in depth from centimeters to several meters. The study involved a broadscale habitat survey with measurements of sand depth and subsoil characteristics in relation to capsule density, an important measure of food availability. Sand depth and subsoil type had no discernible effect on habitat productivity for either species of stringybark (Brown Stringybark and Desert Stringybark), but substantial differences in habitat productivity were found to be associated with different understorey communities. In particular, stringybark woodlands with understorey communities dominated by large grass-trees (*Xanthorrhoea australis*) were found to be substantially lower in capsule density for both stringybark species, while communities dominated by bracken were found to be substantially higher in capsule density. It is not clear why understorey type has such a profound influence on habitat productivity. Differences in soil characteristics and rainfall are likely to play a role, but it seems that certain understorey types compete more with the trees for nutrients and water.

Comparison of capsule density scores from this study with those from previous studies suggests that habitat productivity is currently very low across the range of the RTBC for both species of stringybark. In addition, the vast majority of stringybark habitats surveyed in this study showed signs of

dieback, which is thought to have resulted from extensive infestations of leaf-defoliating insects over the past five years. These observations are consistent with symptoms of drought stress linked to climate change which have been noted in many other parts of Australia and globally. This is cause for concern, particularly when combined with flock count reports which indicate low breeding success in recent years. At least both species of stringybark are flowering well this year, which should see increased food supplies over the next year or two. Further research is proposed to determine whether these trends in habitat productivity are consistent over time.

Dr Paul Koch
Future Ecosystems



A flowering stringybark. Photo: Tim Burnard

PROJECT TACKLES PINE TREE INVASION ON SOUTH-WEST PUBLIC LAND

One of the south-west's most iconic and vulnerable bird species is set to benefit from a new project targeting pine tree invasion on public land.

The Glenelg Pine project, being delivered by Forest Fire Management Victoria, is a three-year project to improve, protect and rehabilitate stringybark woodlands – home to the critically endangered South-eastern Red-tail Black Cockatoo. Project Officer Katrina Shawcroft said "Pine tree infestations are an issue in stringybark woodlands in Victoria's south-west."

"They grow prolifically, crowd out the existing Eucalypt canopy and eventually kill it," Ms Shawcroft said.

"The Glenelg Pine project sets out to reduce pine tree invasion on public land, helping rejuvenate the landscape and ensure habitat for Red-tails and other bird species.

"The project will be delivered over three years across 3,780 hectares of public land, from the Lower Glenelg National Park in the south and as far north as the Dergholm State Park.

"A combination of mechanical and manual treatments will be used to manage pine infestations.

"Mechanical delivery will involve harvesting machines removing the pine trees, while manual options include a mixture of falling, lopping and herbicide.

"Intervening in these areas that are becoming overrun with pine trees will prevent further loss of the tree canopy and impacts to the larger ecosystem.

"By clearing pines out of areas that have been impacted by their presence, we can rejuvenate the landscape and regain that habitat for many different species.

"Brown Stringybark and Desert Stringybark are the sole food source for Red-tails south of the Wimmera.

"Improving, protecting and rehabilitating these woodland ecosystems will greatly benefit the flora and fauna native to the area."

Glenelg Pines is an extension of Glenelg Eden, a project established by Forest Fire Management Victoria in 2008 to help protect the biodiversity values of more than 79,000 hectares of public land in the state's south-west.

The project is funded under the State Government's Biodiversity Response Plan as part of *Protecting Victoria's Environment - Biodiversity 2037*.



Invasive pine trees in stringybark woodlands
Photo: Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning

TREES FOR LIFE JOINS THE FLOCK

Trees For Life has been providing Red-tail habitat tree seedlings to landholders in south-east South Australia for many years through the Tree Scheme. With recent funding from the Australian Government and in partnership with the South East Natural Resources Management Board, Birdlife Australia and Zoos SA we are very excited to be part of the five-year NLP2 'Communities helping Cockies' project to significantly revegetate and manage valuable habitat on private and public land in South East South Australia.

The project builds on great work by the community and other program partners over many years and it's a privilege to join the team and contribute our skills, enthusiasm and local supporters to get behind the effort.

To help the cockatoo and other wildlife we're supporting landowners and land managers to revegetate stringybark and buloke habitat, control woody weeds in stringybark woodland and look after endangered buloke woodlands.

Helping the Red-tails requires a big community effort and there are many ways you can become involved in this project.

We are looking to land managers in the Red-tail's range in SA who have stringybark or buloke woodland on their

property and would like support with weeds or other management issues. In partnership with Zoos SA's highly successful 'Cockies helping Cockies' project we are also looking to work with private and public landholders with land suitable for planting stringybark or buloke.

We would also love to hear from volunteers, organisations and community groups who are interested in growing seedlings or collecting seed for cockatoos and other wildlife; and/or bush regeneration, weed control, tree planting or tree guard removal.

By working with the community and our partners we can get a lot done over a large area giving Red-tails the best chance of survival, to be enjoyed by generations to come.

Cassie Hlava started in January as the Habitat Officer – South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo, based in Mount Gambier. If you'd like to hear more about the project or get involved please get in touch with Cassie at CassieH@treesforlife.org.au or 08 8406 0500.

*Cassie Hlava
Trees For Life*

*Buloke (Allocasuarina luehmannii) seedlings
ready to be planted this winter
Photo: Brett Oakes*



2019 LUCINDALE FIELD DAYS

The Recovery Team again attended the annual South East Field Days in Lucindale this year on 15-16 March. Luckily we had perfect weather conditions on the day which resulted in a fantastic turnout, and had huge numbers of landholders and members of the public drop by to learn about the Red-tails, report their sightings, and have a friendly chat about how they can be involved in Red-tail activities such as planting trees on their property or volunteering for the Annual Count.

We also took part in the Blue Yakka trail, handing out temporary tattoos and Red-tail pencils to over 350 kids who took part. We decided to keep last year's tradition of testing the kids' Red-tail knowledge first by asking them which of the two birds was male and female using a model we had set up. Most kids answered correctly with many saying they had learned about the cockies at school, which shows the success of the 'Kids helping Cockies' program.

This year we had the addition of our new project partner Trees For Life at the stall, with Habitat Officer Cassie showcasing some flyers and brochures about revegetation and the Tree Scheme. There was strong interest in habitat restoration and protection from the public, and both Cassie and Kerry from the 'Communities helping Cockies' project answered many questions from landholders about what they can do to help the Red-tails. We also had many people sign up to receive our bi-annual newsletter and participate in the Annual Count, and the number of sighting reports we received was fantastic!

The SE Field Days continue to be a great forum to interact with landholders, the public and regional visitors keen to learn more about Red-tails and how they can become involved in Red-tail activities.

A huge thank you to our fantastic 'Red-tail Field Days Team' including Kerry, Evan, Tim, Bron and Cassie for all their help with the site this year – including set-up and pack-up, promotion of events and engagement with our visitors, so brilliant effort Team! We would also like to thank Jack and Pat Bourne for kindly loaning us their pair of immortalised Red-tails to showcase to the public.

Many thanks to everyone who visited our stall and passed on their sightings; we hope next year will be just as successful.

Kelsey Bennett



*The Red-tails stall at the Lucindale Field Days
Photo: Kelsey Bennett*

PUTTING TREES BACK INTO PADDOCKS: WHAT THE KOWREE FARM TREE GROUP IS UP TO

Kowree Farm Tree Group (KFTG) has been fiddling about with the establishment of individually guarded paddock trees for about 10 years. Planting trees in this way has a long and fairly obvious list of short-comings, but also has some advantages. Some of the advantages include:

- The small outlay to participate; if someone wants to plant five trees on their small block of land it can be done.
- Less land area required; no need to fence off half the paddock, which is a deterrent to many farmers.
- Can mix seedlings with older paddock trees to create a slightly mixed age structure.
- Growth rates of spaced trees (once established) will almost certainly be higher.
- Seed production per tree (for fattening cockatoos) will potentially be much higher.
- On grazing properties, it is very easy to recruit farmers to do this type of work. Getting onto lots of new farms has led to some useful and unpredictable conservation benefits.

Right now, KFTG is involved in three projects to do with the establishment of trees in paddocks.

1. Last year, as part of a larger project, 'Kids helping Cockies'.... funded by the Australian Government's Threatened Species Recovery Fund the KFTG planted 1,300 individually guarded trees. 80% of these were stringybarks and the rest were bulokes. These were planted on eight properties in Victoria between Chetwynd and the Little Desert. At the time of writing (March) it is a little too early to ascertain survival rates for this project. We will do this later in the year and try to learn from this what worked best.
2. This year the KFTG will be planting another 1,000 individually guarded trees; about 70% stringybarks and

30% bulokes. Again, this will be funded by the Australian Government, this time it is an NLP2 grant which comes via the Wimmera CMA's 'Food for the Future' project. KFTG will be collaborating with the Red-tail Recovery Team, Trust for Nature, Greening Australia and the Wimmera CMA to carry out this project. Because of the funding source this year, all work will be within the Wimmera CMA area. *KFTG have already found enough farms to plant our 1,000 trees, but if more people want to participate, we would be keen to spread the 1,000 seedlings across more farms.*

3. The third project KFTG is involved in is via our loose association with Laurie Krauss, a PhD student at RMIT, Bundoora. Bulokes have male and female trees, and only female trees are capable of feeding Red-tails. Since paddock trees are very expensive to establish, we would like to know that the majority of seedlings we plant will produce seed. Laurie is investigating ways of managing the gender ratio of the buloke seedlings we plant. Already she has managed to clone female trees and is currently investigating ways of screening seedlings to determine their gender.

It still seems very weird to drive to a tree planting job with a ute and trailer loaded sky-high with weldmesh, steel posts, spray equipment chemical and fertiliser while the handful of seedlings comfortably fit on the passenger's seat. We consider that we are still very much in a learning phase with this paddock tree business and don't yet dare to offer prescriptions for how to do it. In fact, we would welcome any advice or comments from readers of this article at kowreeftg@bigpond.com.

Andrew Bradey

KFTG President. kowreeftg@bigpond.com



Photo: Michael Waters

KIDS HELPING COCKIES UPDATE

Seven local South East Schools have been helping to grow stringybark food trees for our endangered Red-tails as part of our 'Kids helping Cockies' Project. Over summer each school has helped to propagate hundreds of stringybark seedlings, many of which will be ready for planting over winter.

This term students have been busy helping to transplant germinated seedlings. Some schools had as many as 10+ seedlings growing in the one tube. It was necessary to work with the kids to thin and transplant seedlings to ensure the best possible growth and survival in readiness for planting later in the year.

Thinning sessions have been held at Allendale East Area School, Frances Primary School, Glenburnie Primary School, Lucindale Area School and Tenison Woods College. Students worked really hard to thin most of what had germinated at each school, learning new propagation skills along the way. Positive feedback from teachers and students about the program and our sessions has been really encouraging, with some students commenting that "this had been the best thing they had been involved in".

One of the aims of this project is to raise awareness of the specialised needs of the cockatoo and how communities can get involved in their recovery. In early March we were fortunate enough to showcase our project and the amazing work of Glenburnie Primary School to two ABC journalists, Rebecca Whetham and Isadora Boyle who were keen to produce a news story after reading about the project in the last edition of Red-tail News.

During our session, students were filmed learning about Red-tails, cleaning stringybark seed, talking about their e-books and experiences from the program, and thinning and weeding stringybark seedlings planted from seed collected last year.

Angela Jones who works with the students to propagate native trees for the Forestry SA 'Biodiversity Corridors Program' has

been heavily involved in 'Kids helping Cockies' for many years now and was delighted to be able to showcase the school's amazing work in helping to grow food trees for the birds.

The students interviewed showed amazing courage as they were put under the spotlight to answer questions about their experiences and learnings with the program and in seeing Red-tails during their visit to Nangwarry Native Forest Reserve to collect seed last year. A big thank you to Bec and Isadora for taking an interest in our terrific little project and for sharing our story to the wider community.

In March, Newbery Park Primary School participated in an excursion led by Angela Jones to Nangwarry Native Forest Reserve to collect stringybark seed and observe Red-tails. During our visit we were able to locate and show the students a flock of about 40+ Red-tails feeding in the stringybark trees. Students were amazed and thrilled to finally see the birds that they had learnt so much about.

By educating and providing kids with conservation experiences including those provided as part of this program, we are paving the way for a better future not only for our iconic cockatoos but for biodiversity.

If your school is interested in getting involved in the 'Kids helping Cockies' Program please contact myself on 0438 317 024 or email bronwyn.perryman@birdlife.org.au at any stage.

The BirdLife Australia 'Kids helping Cockies' Project is supported by the South East Natural Resources Management Board through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program.

Bron Perryman
Kids helping Cockies Coordinator



Allendale East Area School students Sharni, Nash, Brock and Chloe helping to transplant stringybark seedlings grown as part of the Kids helping Cockies Project

Photo: Bron Perryman



1. Students and staff from Newbery Park Primary School were excited to see Red-tails as part of their excursion to collect stringybark seed at Nangwarra Native Forest Reserve. Photo: Bron Perryman **2.** Stringybark seedlings grown from seed collected at Wandilo Native Forest Reserve. Photo: Bron Perryman **3.** Tenison Woods College students working to thin and transplant seedlings Photo: Stacy Chapman **4.** Glenburnie Primary School students, Lilly G, Stella, Abbey and Tyler were interviewed by ABC journalists Bec Whetham and Isadora Boyle on their experiences seeing Red-tails and e-books produced as part of their learnings and involvement with the program. Photo: Bron Perryman **5.** Lucindale Area School students help to thin and transplant 200 stringybark seedlings grown from seed. Photo: Carol Hille



A pair of Red-tails enjoy a drink from a stock trough. Photo: Rick Dawson.

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Help us create positive outcomes for birds and their habitats

Kelsey Bennett

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

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