

Red-tail NEWS

Waving the Red-tail flag protecting far more than just a bird

A flagship species is an iconic species selected to act as an ambassador or symbol to highlight an environmental cause or issue that affects a defined habitat. With a range of 18,000km², the Red-tail truly deserves this status as it takes in areas of south west Victoria and south east South Australia that have been extensively cleared in the past. The remnant stands of buloke and red gum woodland, stringybark forest and scattered trees on farms are critical, not just for the survival of Red-tails, but also to a number of other species including the Long-nosed Potoroo, Southern Brown Bandicoot and the Heath Mouse. But being a highly visible species, any significant variations to the Red-tail population are more immediately obvious and alert us to issues affecting these vital vegetation habitats.

The project recovery team then, by focusing its conservation activity around the Red-tail, is truly working at a landscape-scale and consequently our efforts make a difference for every living thing in that range.

We know that protecting habitat via on-ground works is one of the most effective tasks for achieving best-practice landscape-wide outcomes. The team is directly involved in projects to plant and protect buloke and stringybark trees on properties throughout the area. Among others these include:

- A partnership with Conservation Volunteers Australia, which saw 25,000 buloke, stringybark and associated species seedlings planted

last year, and will see a further 25,000 seedlings planted this year.

- One of the regions most successful on-farm habitat restoration projects in the Lucindale area. Red-tail Recovery Team member Kerry Gilkes (employed by Zoos SA) has worked with 45 properties to date, resulting in the planting of 6,200 stringybark seedlings and associated species, and direct seeding over a total of 80 hectares. In addition, over 170 hectares of habitat has been fenced off to protect existing remnant areas of stringybark on these properties.

The research that underpins our efforts also drives government decision-making and policy for the region. This has a positive flow-on effect for many types of flora and fauna. Nesting hollows are of critical importance to the Red-tail and the team works actively to protect such trees. Due to the Recovery Team's expert advice, local councils in the Red-tail's range now protect dead trees as nesting sites and government agencies take such sites into account when planning fuel reduction burns. Incredibly, our research work and the involvement of post-graduate students in it has resulted in a number of other doctoral studies including, the effect of fire on stringybark seed production, buloke woodlands, reptiles, mammals, flora and frogs in stringybark woodlands. This has greatly increased our knowledge

about this region and its environmental health.

We provide education resources to other agencies and directly involve the community in environment activities. We produce pamphlets, posters, a newsletter, a website and various other promotional tools to increase community awareness of regional environmental needs. We conduct the annual count involving over

150 volunteers and we run a 1800 phone line for the community to report sightings. We talk to NRM managers, schools, Landcare groups, other agencies and farmers about how to protect and improve Red-tail habitat.

to secure the funding needed for essential on-ground activities is an ongoing task that requires dedication and perseverance.

The information gathered through our research is freely available. It forms the basis of the resources and tools we use to educate the wider community and increase awareness about the Red-tail and its habitat. It also assists the conservation efforts of various other stakeholders in the area such as, Trust for Nature, Zoos SA, Habitat 141, Conservation Volunteers Australia, mecu Ltd, Conservation Foundation (SA), and the Kowree Tree Group.

Although Birds Australia manages the Recovery project, the flagship status of the Red-tail is used by many organisations to achieve a number of goals. Protecting this iconic bird helps plants and animals of all shapes and sizes, as well as communities.



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Falling Short

Anyone working in conservation knows that to secure the funding needed for essential on-ground activities is an ongoing task that requires dedication and perseverance. The Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo Recovery project team has worked hard to generate good levels of support for Red-tails and is particularly grateful for the funding received from the Glenelg Hopkins and Wimmera Catchment Management Authorities. This year however, while we will continue to receive funding from the Glenelg Hopkins and Wimmera CMAs, there is no dedicated funding for Red-tail recovery activities committed at this stage from South Australia.. This leaves us with a big gap to fill.

Rest assured we're working hard to find the money needed so that we can implement the full range of activities to protect and

preserve this iconic flagship species. We also have some new initiatives that we would like to trial, the funding of which will enable us to more accurately assess Red-tail numbers on private property. Currently we are talking with a group of people that have shown some interest in supporting the project but we can always do with more help.

If you would like to help, or know of any organisations that would like to support our work for the Red-tails, please let us know by contacting Tim Burnard, rtbc@birdsaustralia.com.au or 1800 262 062.



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New online publications

Take a look at some of the recent publications on our website: "Guidelines to growing buloke" describes how to get this hard to grow plant going and "10 amazing things about Red-tails" has a fascinating look at the curious behaviour of Red-tails and other little known facts. <http://www.redtail.com.au/media/fact-sheets.html>



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August 2011 • Issue 32



Welcome

Welcome to the winter edition of Red-tail News.

I'm filling in for Bronwyn Perryman while she is on maternity leave. On 2nd June Bron had a baby boy weighing in at 8lb 4 oz (in her words "a real porker"). Bron and new son Chase are fit and well.

Some people may recall that I've been involved with Red-tails a couple of times

before. It's great to be back in the chair for a few months and I'm really enjoying catching up with so many people from the 'old days'.

Tim Burnard



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Volunteers planting trees near Edenhope

CVA Partnership

Last year Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA) announced that Red-tails would be included in their 'Wild Futures' program with funding for volunteers to revegetate Red-tail habitat over three years.

CVA's Jonathon Lees said that by August this year, CVA will have planted 25,000 seedlings within the range of the Red-tail. Many of the seedlings are important Red-tail food trees (stringybark and buloke) along with a mix of other local species to attempt to return the habitat to its original condition. Trees were planted at Edenhope

(6000), Casterton (3000), Dartmoor (6000) and Mt Richmond (10,000). There is also a planned weed control project coming up near Naracoorte.

CVA have committed to continue Red-tail habitat improvement works for 2011-2012 financial year with 10 weeks work already confirmed for the Lower Glenelg National Park.

Contact Jonathon Lees if you have ideas for any future improvement works at jlee@cva.org.au or 03 5551 3331.

Red-tail NEWS

Male Red-tails have glossy black plumage with stunning, bright red tail panels. Females are quite different but equally spectacular...

2011 Annual Count - the results are in!

A big thank you to all of the volunteers who participated in the Annual Count on Saturday May 7th. Conditions on the day were good, but rains earlier in the year made many of the tracks impassable.

Final numbers are now in and it looks as if a low count will be recorded for the third year in a row. While the result of 837 is slightly more than last years, it doesn't come close to the 2008 result of 1404 birds.

Red-tails roam from the Lower Glenelg National Park up to Keith and from Lucindale to Balmoral, so finding them in an 18,000 km2 area is always a challenge. It's likely that many birds were missed in the scrub, rather than suffering a population decline since the record 2008 count.

Overall, Red-tails appear to have moved north this year. The biggest mob (201 birds) was spotted north east of Edenhope by long time Red-tail observers Ros and Andrew Bradey. Interestingly, very few birds were sighted south of Casterton.

The Annual Count gives an indication of population size. By taking this snapshot across the range, we get a better understanding of the Red-tails' preferred habitat, which is used to target future conservation works. The count is also important in locating larger flocks. We conduct special counts of the larger flocks to give us an indication of last years breeding success (see David's story next page).

Importantly, the annual count is a great way for the community to get involved in Red-tail

recovery; evidenced by the 160 volunteers who helped out this year, with some travelling from as far as Adelaide and Melbourne. Many of the volunteers were local farmers surveying their own properties.

Volunteers attended a campout at Baileys Rocks (just north of Dergholm) after the Count to share tales of success in locating birds. Max Arney, a long-time Red-tail supporter, tallied his count at 75. I need to find out his secret as he often discovers big mobs of Red-tails on count day and I rarely see any!

Apart from helping our research efforts, the count is a great way to promote awareness of the conservation needs of this local flagship species and provide a fantastic activity, enjoyed by young and old. Thanks again to everyone.



Red-tail family coming in to drink.

Flock Counts

This year's Annual Count has helped us identify a lot of new information – including the location of the larger flocks so they could be flock-counted.

The purpose of a flock-count is to provide information on the sex ratio of the flocks, including the percentage of juveniles. Identifying how many juveniles are in a flock, gives us insight into reproductive success of previous years.

Flock-counting involves distinguishing adult males (black plumage, solid red panel in tail) from the rest (yellow spots in plumage, barred tail panel with red and yellow). The non-adult males are either females or juveniles.

As with other similar species, the Red-tail has an approximately 50:50 ratio between the sexes in adult birds. So if a flock has 39 per cent adult males then it is assumed that the flock also has 39 per cent adult females. Thus if there are 39 per cent adult males and 39 per cent adult females totalling 78 per cent adults, the remaining 22 per cent of the flock must be birds less than four years old (when young males assume the adult plumage).

It is very difficult to count individual Red-tails when they are in a tree canopy feeding or roosting. The most opportune time to flock-count is when the birds leave the tree canopy and go for a drink, before roosting for the night. Red-tails have been

recorded drinking from livestock water troughs, dams and even puddles in the middle of muddy tracks. In a season like the one we're having that means almost everywhere! You'd be forgiven for thinking that'd make it easier; however it actually translates into many more places to search.

Luckily, this just provides another excuse to throw off the office shackles and get out into the field to see (a.k.a. objectively observe and gather scientific data) these beautiful birds. The field season has also allowed me to meet many of the land owners and dedicated Red-tail watchers. Thanks to all who have provided assistance and tips on the movements of Red-tails in their patch.

This year's results give an indication of the success of the previous breeding season. The percentage of males to date is 42 per cent and 16 per cent birds less than four years old. The Red-tails have been breeding, but it could be better. Let's hope this season of plentiful rain translates to plenty more chicks.

By David Williams

South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo Recovery Project Officer

Nest incentive scheme announced

We have launched a new scheme to reward landholders for discovery of 'new' Red-tail nest sites, with a grant from the Nature Foundation of South Australia. The new scheme kicked off on June 1st 2011 and will extend to March 31st 2012.

After 20 years of searching for Red-tail nests, only 80 have been discovered. We believe there are many more active nests out there and look forward to talking to farmers and landholders to help us find them.

When a Red-tail nest is discovered the project team are called in to place a collar on the nest to protect it from predators, like Brush-tailed Possums. The nest location is recorded and helps us understand more about ideal nesting sites for Red-tails. This data uncovers the distance of a nest from a preferred food source, which in turn helps us to prioritise habitat to protect and restore.

An incentive of \$500 will go to landholders for each 'new' nest found on their land. A 'new' nest is one that has not been recorded in our database. The same amount will be paid to local community members who report a 'new' nest on public land. A \$100 one-off payment will be made for each eligible nest site that is on our database and found to be in use again.

While reporting of all Red-tail nesting activity is encouraged, interference or physical disturbance to nest trees is prohibited. All observation should be done from a safe distance. Disturbed birds may abandon their nest, which will result in no payment being awarded.

There are a number of conditions required when applying for the scheme. Incentive payments will be made once the sighting has been confirmed by the project team.

Guidelines for the nest incentive scheme and information on Red-tail nesting behaviour are available on our website www.redtail.com.au.



It can happen to anyone, just ask Richard, our Field Biologist from the early days.

Safety in the Bush - A reminder

When the annual count is organised our first priority is the safety of volunteers going out into the bush. We use Occupational Health & Safety (OH&S) forms to make sure counters are aware of the risks and ensure appropriate behaviour while out in the field.

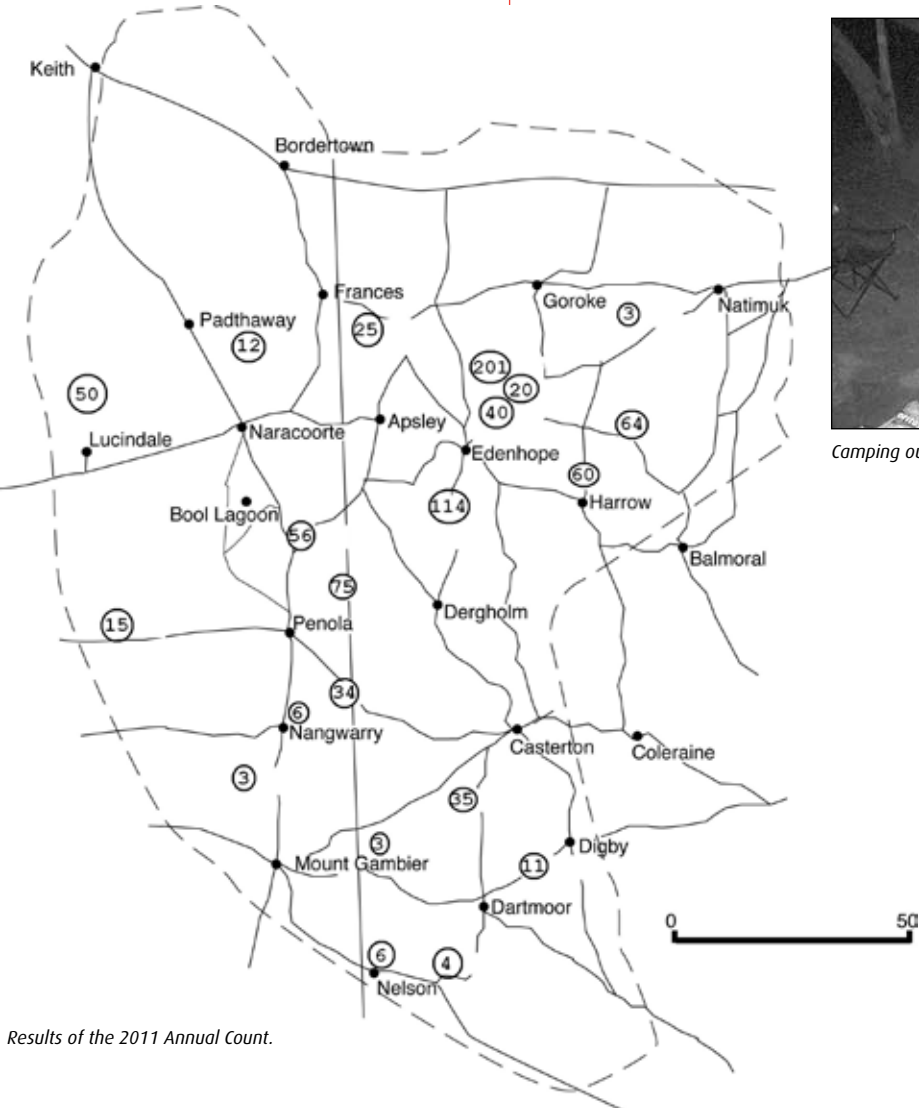
Many of the tracks in the region were boggy during this year's Count and there were two reported incidents of vehicles getting bogged. The first incident in the Brimboal State Forest (east of Dergholm) was quite serious. Two of our volunteers became bogged late in the day and one of them set out on foot to seek assistance, but was misled by his maps. When he and his companion hadn't returned home that night, his wife contacted the police. Units

were dispatched from Casterton, Coleraine and Balmoral and located our volunteer at 3.00am the next morning. The police had themselves become bogged a couple of times, but working as a team, were able to get out and continue the search. In our volunteer's words the police "expertly and efficiently" got the car out; he was full of praise for the officers' conduct saying that they were very helpful despite being called out while off duty in the middle of the night.

We stress to all participants that they are responsible for their own well being and they should adhere to the safety guidelines we provide them while taking part in the activity. We were quite distressed to hear of this experience. Our volunteer had a

few suggestions on how he could have been better prepared. Most importantly, he said he should have left his wife with a copy of the map we sent out prior to the Count. This would have given police a far more precise area to search in. Secondly, because he was a local and experienced bush walker, he didn't take all of the normal precautions regarding water, food and warm clothing. He would like this to be a reminder to all of us every time we venture into the bush.

Despite our efforts, there is always the chance that incidents of this nature will occur. It is extremely comforting to know that when things do go wrong, the local police can be relied upon to come to our aid.



Camping out at this years Annual Count.

Electronic Red-tail News

Just prior to the last newsletter going out, we suffered a computer melt down and lost details of how our newsletter recipients prefer to receive Red-tail News. This may have resulted in some supporters not receiving a newsletter at all. We encourage you to receive the newsletter electronically, as this lightens our workload and saves our precious resources. Please email us at rtbc@birdsaustralia.com.au if you are keen to receive the electronic version.