

# Red-tail News

Issue 46 April 2018



A spectacular sight –  
a female Red-tailed  
Black-Cockatoo in  
flight

Photo: Mike Sverns

## WELCOME TO EDITION 46 OF RED-TAIL NEWS.

Welcome to our first Red-tail News for 2018. We hope you all had a wonderful festive season and recent Easter break. In 2018 we again look forward to bringing you all the latest news and updates as part of our Red-tail project and that you can continue to help us in securing a better future for our much loved cockatoos.

In this edition Kerry Gilkes and Zoos SA have some exciting news to share about recent sightings of Red-tails feeding in stringybark trees established as part of the highly successful

'Cockies helping Cockies' habitat restoration project. This is an amazing achievement and gives confidence to all those involved in planting stringybark food trees for Red-tails.

We are also looking for volunteers to help with our upcoming annual cocky count which will be held on Saturday 5 May. Joining the count is easy – simply contact myself on 1800 262 062 or [redtail@birdlife.org.au](mailto:redtail@birdlife.org.au) to secure your search area.

We will also hear from hard working PhD student Daniella Teixeira on progress with developing a new bioacoustic methodology to monitor Red-tail breeding; Richard and Tim on their new nest box trial inspired by our black-cockatoo recovery counterparts in WA, and opportunities for Victorian landholders to become involved in Red-tail conservation efforts as part of the Kowree Farm Tree Group's 'Kids helping Cockies' Project.

The Kowree Farm Tree Group are also progressing a landholder conservation network for those who own and manage land for conservation. An information day is planned on the Sunday 6 May following the annual count – read more below.

*Thanks, Bronwyn*

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## WHICH NEST IS BEST?

Our Red-tails are faced with declining nest choices as the large trees with hollows they need are dying in paddocks, knocked over in storms, or burned at a faster rate than they are being replaced. As a result, the Recovery Team has decided to look at ways to provide additional nest sites. One way is to install nest boxes however there are a number of critical things we need to find out about how Red-tails might use nest boxes or how to provide viable boxes in the landscape long term.

On Kangaroo Island and in WA people have been using nest boxes for much longer, and we recently funded a visit from one of these experts to help us decide how best to use nest boxes, if at all, for our cockatoos. From what we learned we have decided to run a trial of different nest box configurations to test the optimum design.

Our trial will start this nesting season. The aim is to test three different aspects of nest boxes:

- 1 The width of the nest box: we will evaluate two different widths.
- 2 Height: we will place boxes at two different heights. The first at a height we know the cockatoos tend to use, and the other at a lower height which would allow us to maintain them more easily.
- 3 Tree type: we will install boxes in both live and dead trees to see if there is a preference.

Surveillance cameras will monitor the nest boxes constantly over the nesting season and will provide us with a lot of insights into how different animals use nest boxes. The new nest boxes are designed to be less attractive to white cockatoos and corellas, which are much more common within the SERTBC range and may compete for nest hollows with Red-tails. They are also designed to be very durable to minimise the frequency with which we have to maintain them.

There are many obstacles to a nest box program really contributing to conserving Red tails. Because Red-tails are nomadic, each pair may use a large number of different trees across their range to nest during their lifetime. Badly designed nest boxes can trap cockatoos and are thus counterproductive. The aim of this trial is to help us make the right decisions about how to best use nest boxes to assist Red-tail recovery.

*Richard Hill, Senior Biodiversity Officer, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP)*



*Comparison of old (white) and new (black) design of artificial nest boxes for Red-tails. Photo: Tim Burnard*

## DO YOU OWN AND/OR MANAGE LAND FOR CONSERVATION?

Do you own and/or manage land for conservation? Many people do throughout the Red-tail's range across south east SA and south west Victoria. There has been an idea floating around for some time and building on the Cockies helping Cockies mentor program to create a network of likeminded farmers to support one another, share information and our environmental passion.

The Kowree Farm Tree Group (KFTG), based in Edenhope, is in the process of setting up just such a network. We think it's important to run the odd event too and so we propose to organise the occasional get-together to hear an interesting speaker or two or stickybeak and learn from other landholders' achievements.

If you are interested in joining the Kowree Private Conservancies Network (KPCN) you are invited to:

- Come to a **meeting at "Merrin"**, the property of Anne and Andrew Craig (**Benayeo, Vic – about 65km / 50mins**

**north of Bailey's Rocks**) on Sunday 6 May (the day after the Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo Annual Count). At this meeting we will be discussing how to run this network and what people would expect from it. Lunch will be provided and there will also be opportunities to see around Merrin and hear about the successes and challenges of managing it for conservation.

- For more information, map/directions and to RSVP for catering please get in touch with:

Andrew Bradey, 03 55873558 or

Anne Craig 08 8762 1936 or 0429 167473

adaecraig@gmail.com or

Annette Jones kftglandcare@gmail.com 0402 209175

*Annette Jones, Landcare Facilitator KFTG*



## CALLING VOLUTEERS FOR 2018 ANNUAL COCKY COUNT

BirdLife Australia and the Recovery Team are looking for volunteers to assist with the 2018 annual count for Red-tails.

This year the count will be held on Saturday 5 May across the cockatoo's range in the south east of South Australia and south west Victoria.

We are seeking as many volunteers as possible to help search for Red-tails across more than sixty sites in stringybark forest, from Keith to Mount Gambier in SA and Nelson to Little Desert National Park in Victoria.

Participating is easy – all you need is a partner/friend or group, binoculars, a love of the outdoors and a vehicle; preferably 4WD. Volunteers will cover their allocated site via vehicle, looking and listening out for the distinctive 'karak-karak' call of the cockatoo.

Volunteers need no prior experience with surveying for birds but are required to become familiar with what Red-tails look and sound like, as they can often be mistaken for the more common Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo. To hear the difference between a Red-tail and Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo please visit our website [www.redtail.com.au](http://www.redtail.com.au).

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

Red-tails regularly water at stock troughs and feed in stringybark habitat that is inaccessible to our counters so it is fantastic when landholders (and other members of the community) report sightings on the day.

The most important reason for conducting the annual count is to identify large flocks for counting as part of our annual flock counts. Flock counts are undertaken each year, following the count, to gain an indication of breeding success in previous seasons.

The count also allows us to identify patterns of habitat use and remind the community to keep an eye out for these special local birds.

To make our count a success we are encouraging anyone that sees Red-tails from now until 5 May to report their sighting to the Project Coordinator (see contact details listed below).

Reporting a sighting is simple, just include your name, date and time of sighting, how many Red-tails were seen and where (map reference is preferable) and what they were doing (ie feeding, flying).

For those new to the count an annual count training session is available on the morning of the count in Casterton. Volunteers will learn what Red-tails look and sound like, what their feeding signs look like and how to identify stringybark habitat from other gum woodlands of less interest to Red-tails. Please nominate your interest in attending the training when registering for the count.

Volunteers are also welcome to attend the annual Bailey's Rock Campout near Dergholm on the night of the count. The campout/dinner provides a great opportunity to share your results and to talk to others involved on the day.

To register for the count 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).

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.

The Recovery Team looks forward to hearing from both returning and new participants and hopes for another successful year of cocky counting. Although we can't 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 and catching up with other cocky counters.



A flock of Red-tails spotted by Mike Sverns and his Team on count day 2016.

Photo: Mike Sverns





Emily Cotterill helping to plant out the 'Lantara' stringybark habitat demonstration site in 2009 as part of the highly successful 'Cockies helping Cockies' project.

Photo: Kerry Gilkes



The 'Lantara' site three years on from planting (2012) – stringybarks are thriving.

Photo: Kerry Gilkes



## FROM SEED TO FEED IN UNDER 10 YEARS

Increasing feeding habitat available for our Cockies is looking a whole lot brighter with evidence of Red-tails feeding in stringybarks planted just nine years ago.

The stringybark habitat demonstration site was set up in 2009 at 'Lantara' Lucindale by the 'Cockies Helping Cockies' project in partnership with the landholders who have been involved in the project since its inception.

Kerry Gilkes, Project Contractor for the Cockies Helping Cockies project said "It is incredibly exciting to see evidence of the birds feeding from the young stringybarks and equally exciting to share this with the landholders who regularly report sightings of the birds".

Bus tours and site visits over the years have allowed landholders and cockie enthusiasts the opportunity to see the stringybark habitat grow and fruit into a viable feed site for the birds in the hope we would one day see the birds using it.

Kerry said, "We reported last year in the Red-tail News on the heavy flowering and fruiting of trees not imagining that within 12 months we would have evidence of feeding".

We have included a series of photos which have been taken over the years to plot the site's progress. The photo taken of the tree showing evidence of Red-tails feeding highlights just how thick the seed is with the understorey heavily carpeted with Red-tail chewings. The trees are laden with nuts after two great seasons.

"Regular photos taken of the site have enabled us to compare growth and observe changes in the habitat". It is always rewarding to look back on photos and see how much the landscape has changed" said Kerry.

Previous monitoring of revegetation sites predicted it would be around 15 years before the trees would provide suitable feed habitat for the birds. This is the first-time birds have been sighted feeding in revegetated habitat that we know of.

It is heartening to know that landholders may see Red-tails use their newly planted trees within a decade of their hard work and a great sign for the future if these efforts continue.

*Kerry Gilkes, Extension Contractor, SE Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo and Stringybark Habitat Project.*



'Lantara' seven years from planting (2016). Photo: Kerry Gilkes



Left: Evidence of Red-tail feeding underneath a stringybark tree planted at 'Lantara' in 2009. Photo: Kerry Gilkes



A small flock of Red-tails found in stringybarks planted at 'Lantara' only nine years previous. Photo: Sally Cooper



## MONITORING NESTS USING BIOACOUSTIC SOUND RECORDERS – PROJECT UPDATE.

The 2017-18 Red-tail breeding season is now complete. My hard drives are full of many terabytes of sound data that, over the coming months, I will begin to analyse to measure breeding behaviours and success rates. The season began slowly, with only a single nest found in September – this had me worried!

Thankfully, we found another 10 nests before the year's end and then another three nests in early 2018. Some nests were found at the same properties as the year before, which reiterates that Red-tails can return to the same breeding areas in different years. However, what we don't know is whether it's the same individuals or different pairs.

Red-tails rarely return to the same nest site each year. In fact, only a single nest from the 2016-17 season was re-used this season. This means that even if the birds nest in the same paddock, they don't necessarily use the same tree.

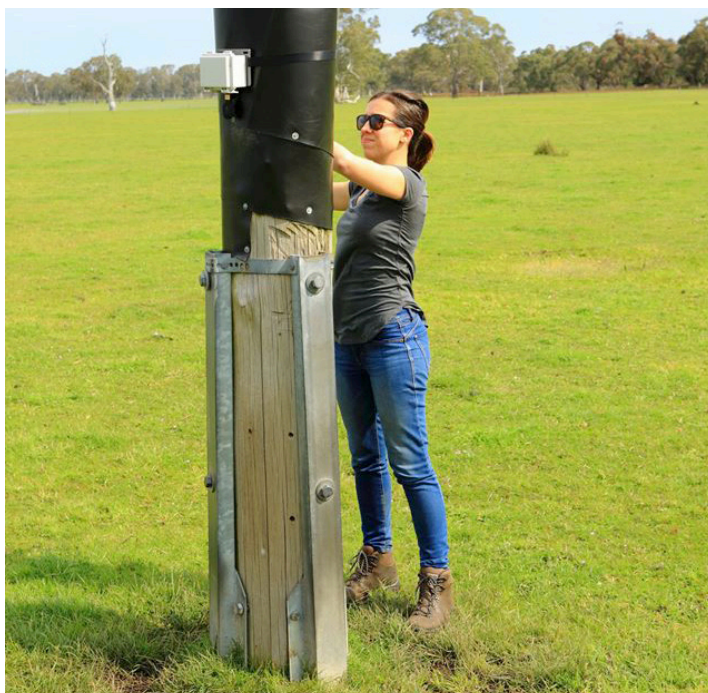
The biggest success for my project so far was that several nests were monitored right through to fledging. This has given me a great dataset from which I will develop and validate bioacoustic methods for nest monitoring. We should also be able to calculate how many nestlings fledged this season – watch this space!

For the next few months, I am refining the methods at known nests of the Glossy Black-cockatoo on Kangaroo Island. Beyond that, the next major step for this project is to find out how to process all that sound data. Listening to it all is simply not an option. My plan is to develop an algorithm that will automatically scan the data and flag when it "hears" a Red-tail. This is no easy task, but if it works (here's hoping!) we should have a way to monitor Red-tail nests that requires half the man power of the current methods.

As always, huge thanks to everyone who helped me this season, including all the landowners whose properties the Red-tails nested on, and especially to Richard Hill, Tim Burnard and Evan Roberts for your help in the field.

If you want to follow my project updates, I post regularly on Facebook at Black-Cockatoo Project and on Instagram @blackcockatoooproject.

*Daniella Teixeira, PhD Student, University of Queensland*



*Dani attaching a sound recorder on a Red-tail nest tree.  
Photo: Rick Dawson.*

## FREE PADDOCK TREES

The Kowree Tree Farm Group, as part of the Kids for Cockies project is seeking suitable farm sites to receive and plant paddock trees within the Red-tail's Victorian range. The best part is that trees and sheep proof guards are free, and you are still able to graze the paddocks!

Recent research has shown that isolated stringybarks in farm paddocks produce 26 times more seed than those in a forest and are a critical food resource for Red-tails. Unfortunately, paddock trees are being lost from the landscape through natural attrition, legal and illegal clearing, stock damage and poor recruitment. By getting involved in this project you will help reverse this trend.

As well as helping Red-tails paddock trees provide many benefits to livestock and even crops. Paddock trees give stock shelter during extreme weather, provide a roost for birds and bats that prey on insect pests, improve soil structure and can be used to manage salinity.

We are seeking sites that are suitable for either Stringybarks (sandy country) or Buloke (clays), there is a preference for sites that are grazed only by sheep but properties grazed by cattle will still be considered. Areas that are to be cropped are not compatible with buloke plantings; however, small areas within cropped paddocks that are not to be cropped (such as a corner) could still be planted.

Those interested should contact Ben Gaylard on 0429 294 485 or via email [ben.gaylard@gmail.com](mailto:ben.gaylard@gmail.com).



*Individually guarded stringybark paddock trees.  
Photo: Andrew Bradey*



## VISITORS FLOCK TO SITE

Every year the Team look forward to waving the Red-tail flag at the annual South East Field Days at Lucindale. This year was no different. Although overall crowd numbers seemed down on previous years we still had a huge number of visitors and local landholders stop by to learn more about Red-tails, provide us with their sightings, and chat about how they can get involved in Red-tail activities.

We also handed out temporary tattoos and pencils to over 350 kids who took part in the annual Blue Yakka Trail. This year they had to earn their goodies by telling us which of the two birds was the female and which the male (I'm happy to report that most answered correctly!). This turned out to be a good conversation starter with kids and parents alike with many going on to ask more questions about the birds and the project.

This year there was a strong interest in local habitat restoration and protection activities, particularly the Cockies helping Cockies project, with Kerry signing a further eight landholders to the program. Expressions of interest to participate in the count and receive our bi-annual newsletter were also high, and the number of sighting reports we received was fantastic!

A popular addition to the site this year was Tim's go-pro footage of the birds coming in to drink at a trough on private land near Nangwarry. The footage proved to be a great draw card and talking point.

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

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

*Bron Perryman*



*Evan, Kerry, myself and Tim at our 2018 Red-tail stand at the Lucindale Field Days.*

## KIDS KICKING GOALS FOR COCKIES

The students at Allendale East Area School have been helping to create new feed trees for Red-tails as part of the ongoing Kids helping Cockies project in SA.

Last November the Year 3 class participated in a seed collection and planting activity which has resulted in the successful germination of hundreds of stringybark seedlings. The students were also treated to a presentation about Red-tails and created some fantastic and inspired Red-tail artwork.

The kids are currently working to separate the seedlings into individual tubes, which they hope to plant out in June on private property north of Mount Gambier.

It's been an absolute pleasure working with such an enthusiastic group of kids, all eager to learn and connect with cockatoos and their food resource.

Since 2013, we have held in-class presentations reaching over 2,500 students from 32 schools in the south east of SA as part of the Kids helping Cockies program. We have also helped to establish six school nurseries to grow and plant out stringybark seedlings for local revegetation projects.

If your school is interested in learning more about Red-tails and/or getting involved in the Kids helping Cockies project, please contact myself on 0438 317 024.

*Bron Perryman*



*Harry, Jett, Nash and Brock helping to plant stringybark seed which will be grown and planted out to provide a future food resource for our Red-tails. Photo: Bron Perryman*



*Stringybark seedlings grown by the Year 4 students at Allendale East Area School. Photo: Bron Perryman*

## REMINDER TO REPORT YOUR SIGHTINGS

Every year leading up to the count we ask people to report in all sightings of Red-tails to the Project Coordinator. By knowing where birds are we can strategically place volunteers on count day in areas where birds are currently known to be feeding. This will help to maximise the number of cockatoos counted on Saturday 5 May.

Report your sightings to Freecall 1800 262 062; email [redtail@birdlife.org.au](mailto:redtail@birdlife.org.au) or via our website [www.redtail.com.au](http://www.redtail.com.au).

Remember to include with your sighting:

- Date and time of sighting
- Number of Red-tails observed
- Location of sighting – preferably a map grid reference
- Bird's activity – whether they were feeding, drinking, flying etc.
- Your details – name and contact email/number.

We are particularly interested to hear from anyone who see flocks drinking at water points such as stock troughs.



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

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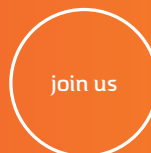
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Bronwyn Perryman

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

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