

Annual Count Summary since 1996

Every year, a group of over 100 enthusiastic volunteers spend one day driving through thousands of kilometres of stringybark forest. Below are the reports from each year

2011 Annual Count Report

The Annual Count was held on Saturday May 7th in decent conditions. The rains earlier in the year made many of the tracks impassable, but count day was calm and allowed for good Red-tail listening.

Final numbers are not in yet but it looks as if another low count will be recorded for the third year in a row. While this years result of 827 (so far) is slightly more than previous years, it doesn't come close to the 2008 result of 1404 birds. It's likely that many birds were missed in the scrub, rather than suffering a population decline since the record 2008 count.

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.

Overall, Red-tails appear to have moved north. The biggest mob (200 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.

Importantly, the annual count is a great way for the community to get involved in Red-tail recovery with more than 160 volunteers taking part this year, with some travelling from as far as Adelaide and Melbourne. Many of the volunteers were local farmers surveying their own properties.

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.

The final results from this years count will be published in the next edition of the Red Tail News. You can be placed on the mail list by contacting Tim Burnard at rtbc@birdsaustralia.com.au.

2010 Annual Count Report

On the 1st May 2010 a team of 159 enthusiastic volunteers set off throughout the stringybark forests in south-eastern South Australia and south-western Victoria in the hope of spotting the endangered South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo. Geared up with binoculars, 4WDs, mountain bikes and a keen sense of hearing, Red-tail enthusiasts scoured more than 2,800 kilometres of stringybark forest in search of the colourful cockies.

Despite a large number of pre-count sightings, including 300 birds seen in the Casterton area only days before the count, the total number counted by sunset was very low. With less than 200 birds counted in an area where only days before 300 birds had been observed in a single flock, our volunteers were left wondering where had all the birds had gone?

Fortunately, follow-up field work by long time Casterton volunteer, Dick Cooper and past Extension Officer, Tim Burnard, resulted in the missing Casterton birds being found, with an additional 165 birds added to the tally. After receiving the full quota of record sheets and several sighting reports either side of count day, the final tally increased to 680 birds.

The total number of birds counted this year is down on last year's total of 750 birds. Bronwyn Perryman, Project Coordinator, said that "Although there has been a reduction in the number of birds counted since 2008, it is unlikely that the population has suffered a severe decline, but rather just that birds were missed on the day. It would be near impossible to count every Red-tail given their high mobility and ability to hide within the stringybark. This year provides a great example of how birds can easily be missed on the day."

This year 300+ birds were observed in the Casterton district feeding in Desert Stringybark (*Eucalyptus arenacea*). Other hotspots for Red-tails on count day included Repeater Station Road North of Naracoorte, Three Chain Road at Wandilo, Tallageira State Forest, and in and around the Dergholm district. Conversely, last year birds were concentrated around the Mumbanner, Rennick and Lower Glenelg region. This year only 10 birds were recorded in the area. The birds appear to be feeding predominantly in tracts of Desert Stringybark forest, which occur in and around the Casterton, Edenhope and Naracoorte districts. Our results also confirm how dramatically the use of areas by Red-tails across the range change from year to year depending on the availability of their food resources.

The annual count allows us to estimate a minimum population size and provides us with an indication of habitat use and where we can focus habitat protection and restoration works in the future. It promotes awareness of the specialised needs of this colourful local and engages the community. This event would not be possible without the help and support of our fantastic network of volunteers. A big thank you to all involved. Contact Bronwyn Perryman to help out in next year's Annual Count.

2009 Annual Count Report

Apologies for the belated feedback on the 2009 annual count which was held way back on May 2nd 2009. In stark contrast to 2008 when over 1400 birds were recorded, the 2009 count lead-up started with very patchy information on the bird's movements and ended with a significantly lower count total. Despite a grim tally at sunset, some follow-up field work and an almost full quota of record sheets resulted in a total count of 750 birds. On the Saturday night those camping at Bailey's Rocks only managed a combined tally of 40 birds. Last year those converging on Bailey's Rocks notched up over 800 birds by sunset!

Despite extensive pre-count media we suspected a much lower count this year based on sightings information that was coming in from members of the public. Red Tails have really demonstrated just how broadly they range in response to their feeding resource and how dramatically their use of an area can change from season to season. Last year 869 birds were located in a relatively small area south-west of Casterton feeding in a new seed crop in *E. Arenacea* or Desert Stringybark. This year only 12 birds were recorded in the Casterton area. Conversely, Lower Glenelg National Park recorded no birds last year and this year over 300 birds were recorded in the Mumbannar, Rennick, Lower Glenelg area which is a Brown Stringybark area.

Significantly, 3 independent sightings have been made of Red Tails feeding on a new eucalypt seed in and beyond the cocky's range in South Australia. In the past Red Tails have been observed feeding on other trees but these have been incidental sightings of what has been almost experimental behaviour. The birds haven't seriously tucked into these alternatives. However, over April and May, Red Tails spent extended periods feeding in *Eucalyptus*

diversifolia, commonly known as Coastal or Soap Mallee. Large quantities of chewings were left under the trees and the behaviour continued for weeks. This eucalypt has a similar sized seed capsule to the stringybark normally utilised by Red tails. One observer who has lived on the property in question for 40 years has never observed Red Tails in his area before suggesting that the birds may be foraging more widely in search of food this year. More significantly, have they incorporated another seed into their highly specialised diet? We will be watching the behaviour of birds in this area and in other coastal or soap mallee areas with interest over the coming months and years.

Thanks again to the 146 volunteers who headed off on the day and to those that took time to report sightings in the lead up and following the count. We couldn't do it without you!

Tania Rajic

2008 annual count Report

Results from the Saturday May 3rd Annual Count of the South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo are the best recorded since counting commenced in 1996. One of five subspecies of red-tailed black-cockatoo across Australia, the South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo is the only subspecies listed as Endangered under the EPBC Act 1999. The annual count assists the recovery team with monitoring of the size and distribution of the population. Almost 100 volunteer groups from across South Australia and Victoria set off on the day in anticipation of hearing the bird's call and sighting the brilliant combination of crimson, black and burnt orange/yellow plumage. While some record sheets are yet to be returned about 1350 birds have been recorded to date. The previous best record was 1078 birds recorded in 2006. More than 60% of birds were sighted in the Casterton area. Continuing dry weather has made the birds dependent on artificial waters with most of the Casterton birds counted as they were coming into stock troughs to drink on dusk.

Population estimates based on the count vary from year to year. While the previous best figure was 1078 birds recorded in 2006, only 801 birds were recorded in 2007. This is not attributed to a sudden decline in the population. Weather conditions can influence the success of the count as very windy conditions make it difficult to hear and locate birds. Perfect weather certainly contributed to the success of the 2008 count. In addition lots of pre-count volunteer input from long time Casterton volunteer, Dick Cooper and Field Biologist Richard Hill, ensured that volunteers were placed at 7 drinking sites around Casterton where they could successfully count flocks ranging in size from 233 birds to 32. Other large flocks were recorded in Victoria with 239 birds counted near the South Australian border just west of Coonawarra. Congratulations to Max Arney of Penola who took out the coveted Annual Counter award for this record. 110 birds were counted in Penola Forest Reserve near Nangwarry in South Australia.

About 30 volunteers converged to Bailey's Rocks Dergholm State Park following the count. Over the coming weeks the project's field biologist, Richard Hill will collect flock count data to determine the success of the previous breeding season. Thanks to a great team of volunteers for their outstanding efforts on the day. If you're interested in registering your interest in next year's count please contact the Project Coordinator via rtbc@birdsaustralia.com.au.

2007 annual count report

The annual count was held on Saturday April 28th in pretty good conditions. Whilst it was a bit cool and rain earlier in the week had made some tracks a bit tricky, the day was calm and made for good Red Tail listening.

Those who took part in the count or who saw media articles directly after the count, will know that there was a surprising drop in the numbers counted, but the initial number has been lifted

slightly following a couple of late entries. At first we had reported a total of a mere 675 Red Tails throughout the range, compared to last years record number of 1078. This number has now been increased to a total of 801.

While the number counted is the lowest we have seen for several years it is not to say that the birds have actually suffered a population dive since last years count. It's more likely that we just missed the birds in the scrub.

And as those who have been out looking for Red Tails can testify, missing the birds is easily done. Red Tails roam from the Lower Glenelg National Park up to Keith and from Lucindale to Balmoral and finding the approximately 1000 birds in a total possible area of 18,000 km² is always going to be a bit hit and miss. We do trim down the area by holding the event after bulokes have dropped their seed. This means that all the Red Tails will be in stringybark forest, so at least we don't have to look in the buloke areas.

It's still a huge area and we will never be assured of counting all the birds. For example, from recent sightings, we were reasonably sure that a large mob of up to 200 would be found in the Lower Glenelg National Park but come the count, nobody found them and subsequent searches by the Recovery Team and Parks Vic have failed to find them. Oh well, that's Cocky counting! And even though we can't count all the Red Tails, the Annual Count is still important because it gives more than just an indication of population size. By taking this snapshot across the range, we get a better understanding of the preferred habitat and use this information in helping to target future conservation works.

While the number of Red Tails counted was down, the number of volunteers has again climbed. This year 190 volunteers took part. Some travelled from as far as Adelaide and Melbourne, but the majority of those involved were from within region. Many of the volunteers were local landholders surveying their own properties; others were supplied with a map and instructions on how best to spot Red Tails. It's a great family outing and adds to knowledge about the bird and its needs.

The big winner region in this years count was along the SA/Vic border near Penola and Nangwarry. Locals, Max Arney and Jim Childs saw the most birds. Max spotted 299 birds including 157 in one flock, and Jim saw a mob of 150. Both men have a long interest in the birds and like many other participants, have been involved in the count for most of the past 11 years.

The Baileys Rocks (just north of Dergholm) camp out on the Saturday night was another success and for all those who didn't see a Red Tail during the day, the campers were rewarded by a group of three that flew over at sunset and again at sunrise. I was particularly pleased as, after 10 years of taking part in the count, it was the first time I had seen Red Tails on the actual count day!

2006 Annual Count Report

Thanks to a great team of 155 volunteers, new and old, 1078 Red-tailed Black-Cockies were counted this year. Coordinated by Birds Australia, the count was conducted on April 29th across the birds range, south-east South Australia and south-west Victoria. Volunteers travelled from as far away as Mildura, Melbourne, Adelaide and Langhorne Creek. 2,500km of stringybark tracks were traversed on the day - no mean feat considering the cost of fuel. 316 Red-tails were recorded in South Australia. 762 were spotted in Victoria. Some large flocks were counted this year including 110 at Wandilo Native Forest Reserve, 58 at Lucindale and 50 near Struan. A flock of 221 Red-tails was just over the SA/Vic border on the Victorian side - in Lower Glenelg National Park. Other flocks in Victoria included 86 at Rennick State Forest and 214 at Chetwynd. This is an encouraging result, an increase on last years figure of 952 birds. Congratulations and thanks to

the many landholders and others that volunteered all or part of their Saturday to participate in the count.

2005 Annual Count Report

On May 1 2005, 119 volunteers covered over 2000 km in stringybark to find 952 Red-tails. Volunteers cover 59 individual sites across the Red-tail range, noting where and when the birds were seen and what they were doing. Following the annual count, the data is checked to ensure that the same birds aren't being recorded at more than one site. Annual count results this year are the highest recorded to date. Results from flock counts which give us an idea of the level of new recruitment into the population are promising and suggest that the 2004/05 breeding season may have seen good recruitment of juvenile birds into the population. If you would like to find out more about the annual count or register interest in participating in 2006, please email: rtbc@birdsaustralia.com.au or telephone 1800 262 062

Summary of Results

Year	Season	Total
1996	Summer	436
1997	Summer	300
1998	Summer	385
1998	Winter	632
2000	Summer	452
2001	Summer	686
2002	Autumn	679
2003	Autumn	785
2004	Autumn	726
2005	Autumn	952
2006	Autumn	1078
2007	Autumn	801
2008	Autumn	1404
2009	Autumn	750
2010	Autumn	680
2011	Autumn	837