



It's Nesting Time Again!

And we need the assistance of all our observer network (that's you) to help find nests. Last year we found 23 nests and by our estimates that's only about 10 - 20% of the total nests throughout the range. With your help we hope to find more this year.

Red Tails normally nest in the hollows of large dead red gums (like the one pictured below) which are normally found in farm paddocks. You can tell if it's being used as a Red Tail nest by quietly waiting in the late afternoon on a still day (only because a windy day makes it hard to hear any distance) and looking out for a single bird or a pair of Red Tails.



Typical Red-tail nest tree

The usual pattern of Red Tail activity is: approaching dusk, the male bird will fly from his feeding ground and on approaching the nest site, will start calling for his mate. She generally drops silently from the nest and joins the male. The two birds (or sometimes with juvenile from the previous nesting) then fly off noisily to a nearby roost where he regurgitates food to her. After 1/2 - 1 hr they return, again noisily and she re-enters the nest. The male generally stays nearby for a while before flying off to roost.

What to do: Record details of time, location (accurate as possible), direction of flight and number of birds - then phone our free call number. By studying nest sites Richard will be able to assess the % of successful fledgings from attempted nesting. This gives the Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo team an indication of whether nesting success is a factor endangering the Red tail.

Annual Count

An early reminder - the next annual count will be held on Saturday 3rd February 2001.

Sponsorship

Southcorp Wines has continued its support of our project this year by funding the printing of 1500 new information kits. The kits are an update of the original with an additional page on Protection of nest trees and a snazzy colour folder. Southcorp Wines sponsorship has also covered costs of an additional run of stickers. Both the information packs and stickers are available by contacting Tim Burnard on 1800 262 062.

Both the Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority and the Wimmera Catchment Management Authority have funded the costs of new information boards. The Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority funding has seen the placement of boards in Hamilton, Portland, Nelson, Dartmoor, Digby, Dergholm, Casterton, Coleraine and the Princess Margaret Rose Caves. Funding from the Wimmera Catchment Management Authority will soon see the placement of boards in Edenhope, Kaniva, Goroke and Nhill. We hope to find a sponsor to cover costs of boards in South Australia.

Stringybark - the good and the bad (by Paul Koch)

A good understanding of the factors influencing the availability of the Red Tail's principal food source - stringybark seed - is essential if we are to understand its foraging movements and determine whether the remaining stringybark remnants are limiting the size of the population. Perhaps the most important of these factors is the time interval between seed crops. By monitoring flower and capsule production over several years across the range of the Red Tail, and talking to local beekeepers, patterns of seed production start to emerge. We can then start to answer questions like: Does all the stringybark in the region produce a good seed crop every year?; and Do these years match up for stringybark occurring in different areas?

It seems that the stringybark produces a large crop of seed every 3 years, on average. This is bad news for the Red Tails because they seem to prefer feeding on fresh (and plentiful!) seed. It also indicates that food availability is better in some years than others. Interestingly, a recent year of food shortage (late 1999 - early 2000) corresponds to a year of low nesting success in that breeding season, compared with other years. This and other observations suggest that food availability might be limiting the population, but much more work is needed to confirm or reject this.

To complicate matters, much of the stringybark in the north of the range is on a different seed production cycle than that of the stringybark in the southern areas. The northern stringybark produced its last big crop in late 1998, whereas most of the southern stringybark has not produced a substantial crop for at least 4 years. This explains why most of the birds have been seen around Edenhope and Naracoorte in recent times. The good news is that the southern stringybark is maturing a new seed crop as we speak, so if Red Tails really prefer the young, green seed, we might expect to see many more birds in the southern part of their range from now on...

Paul Koch is halfway through his PHD study into the feeding ecology of Brown Stringybark.

Nest Predation

Briony Jarmyn has completed her Honours study into Nest Predation of Red Tail nests with some interesting results.

It appears that possums do pose a serious threat to Red Tail nests. Brush-tailed Possums can be quite common in paddocks where there are trees with large hollows and Briony found that collaring nest trees to prevent possums climbing them, markedly increased the Red Tails chances of nesting successfully. The results of Brionys' study means



that we will be putting collars around every known nest tree (about 80 in total). The collars are made of 1.2 metre lengths of old iron - we get ours from the tip - and nailed around the base of the tree. We have already made a start on this and with the assistance of a local Greencorp group have protected 30 trees. We hope to complete the task within the next month.

The Recovery Team thanks Briony for her work and congratulates her on attaining the top grade of First Class Honours.

be bigger than non-feed trees, and have heavier cones, more seeds/cone and seeds with more calories/gram in them, than non-feed trees. Thus the Red Tails appear to be choosing, quite sensibly, those trees with bigger and better cones in which to feed. If we can work out why those trees are bigger and better, and how to grow more of these Buloke, we'll be in a much better position to help the Red Tails increase in population size.

Martine is currently writing up the results of this year's study for her Honours and we wish her good luck, and happy writing.



Protection from possums should see an increase in Red-tail chick numbers

Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo Management Plan

Meanwhile Richard is compiling the results of the various studies into a habitat management plan. This will identify areas within the Red Tail range where protection and enhancement of existing habitat should be a priority, and areas where re-establishment of habitat should occur. Re-establishment of habitats can include natural regeneration of Stringybark, Red Gum or Buloke by removal of grazing from paddocks with scattered trees. This is already occurring in some 'unplatable areas' on plantation company land. Priority areas will be eligible for funding from organizations which assist in the protection and rehabilitation of native vegetation such as government conservation agencies and private groups such as Greening Australia. Richard aims to finish the management plan by the end of this year.

Bulokes ain't all the same...

Last summer Martine Maron from Monash University in Melbourne commenced a study to look at the way Red Tails feed in Buloke asking why it seems that some Buloke patches are much more likely to be used by Red Tails than others. This is part of her Honours year. What she has found so far is very interesting.

Within patches of Buloke the birds tend to feed only in particular trees. By comparing these trees with others in the same patch, Martine found that Buloke feed trees tended to

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