



## Habitats of the South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo at increased risk of removal.

**A key threat** to the nationally endangered South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo (SERTBC) is the removal of the cockatoo's critical feeding and nesting habitats. Over half of the historic stringybark habitat and more than 97% of buloke woodlands have been cleared since pre-European settlement.

Stringybark and buloke feed trees, and large hollow bearing eucalypts that provide nesting habitat are all subject to continued loss.

A large area of the cockatoo's habitat is located on private land, where competing land uses motivate permitted and illegal clearances of habitat. A shift to more intense cropping regimes, using centre pivot irrigation or GPS guided machinery, has led to the removal of scattered trees from paddocks that were historically grazed or subject to less intensive cropping practices.

**The ongoing loss and removal of the SERTBC's key stringybark, buloke and gum woodland habitats presents a major threat to recovery and ongoing viability of the population.**

Of particular concern is the ongoing loss of scattered paddock trees, which provide important nesting and feeding habitat for the cockatoo. Paddock stringybark trees have been found to produce up to 26 times more seed than stringybark trees within patches (Maron *et al.* 2008) highlighting their importance as key food resource for this species.



**Figure 1: Scattered stringybark trees provide an important food resource for the SERTBC.**



**Figure 2: Large scattered River Red Gums provide valuable nesting habitat for the SERTBC.**

Although native vegetation retention legislation provides relatively effective protection for intact woodland and forest patches, scattered paddock trees are often afforded lower levels of protection due to their perceived lower conservation value. To compound the issue, recent changes to Victoria's native vegetation regulations have further increased the risk of clearance, such that some native vegetation can now be removed without any scientific oversight by the Victorian Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI).

The new Native Vegetation Information Management system introduced by DEPI in 2013 to fast track approvals for native vegetation removal does not accurately define or identify critical habitat of the cockatoo. The SERTBC often relies on poorly connected and low-condition habitats that are inadequately represented in the current habitat importance map used for the species under the NVIM system.

The SERTBC Recovery Team has written to DEPI expressing our concerns about these changes. The Recovery Team has also provided feedback and accurate mapping information that might improve the system.

The latest changes to clearance regulations have hastened the need to update local planning overlays to better define and protect feed and nest trees, particularly in the Glenelg Shire where scattered trees are at a greater risk of removal. The Recovery Team is proposing an amendment to the Shire's Environmental Significance Overlay so that it is consistent with that in the West Wimmera Shire.

Unfortunately the amendment cannot be progressed until the new draft National Recovery Plan for the SERTBC is approved by DEPI. The new draft plan was prepared and presented to DEPI for endorsement over two years ago. At a cost to our community group of \$20,000, with half of this investment being paid to DEPI as co-author, the plan is yet to be approved by DEPI. The urgency for this approval is essential not only to assist with updating local planning laws, but to strengthen fire management objectives and ensure the future protection of SERTBC feeding and nesting habitats.

**Without a cessation of ongoing net habitat loss, the SERTBC population will continue to decline, making our efforts for recovery impossible.**

### **Recommendations:**

The current draft National Recovery Plan for the SERTBC (2012-17) be endorsed by the Victorian Government as a matter of priority, and that a better process for the assessment of native vegetation clearance applications in SERTBC habitats be developed to reduce the risk of removal of habitats critical to cockatoo.

### Reference:

Maron, M., Koch, P., Freeman, J., Schultz, S., Dunn, P. & Apan, A. 2008. *Modelling and planning to increase future habitat of the Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo*. Unpublished report Wimmera Catchment Management Authority.



**Figure 3: Paddock buloke provide a critical food resource for the SERTBC, but are subject to continued loss through illegal and permitted clearance for agricultural production.**