

Red-tail News

Issue 56 April 2023



*A group of barred birds in stringybark near Naracoorte
Photo credit: Di Vine*

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WELCOME TO EDITION 56 OF RED-TAIL NEWS.

Welcome back to Red-tail News, the first edition of 2023. This edition of Red-tail News will touch on some of the great work our Red-tail warriors have been achieving since we last caught up at the end of 2022.

The South-eastern Red-tailed Black Cockatoo (SERTBC) Recovery Project is most grateful for a recent gift from the family of a local (Naracoorte) landowner. Thank you so much to this family who are committed to the local environment and believe strongly in supporting the local community. We also received a very kind donation from the Women in Agriculture and Business of SA, thank you ladies! Gifts that we receive go directly into our project and are welcome boosts to projects such as nest box maintenance, increasing feeding habitat and this very newsletter! And also an endless thank you to all the landholders in the region who play a critical role in Red-tail conservation. Enabling us to plant more food trees, protect paddock trees or monitor nest boxes on your property are all ensuring that both current and future generations can hear the sound of Red-tails ring out across Red-tail country.

I would like to thank everyone who took the time to write a story for this newsletter. Your articles help to spread the word about Red-tails and our work which is invaluable. In this edition, we will hear from Oliver Wardle, a Masters student from the University of Melbourne, about his project which looks at predictors of nesting attempts. Bron Perryman gives us an update on what she has been doing with schools in the region and the upcoming planting season. Emily Baldwin also gives us an update on the Communities Helping Cockatoos Project and we will hear about the amazing achievements of a Red-tail Hero.

We hope you enjoy reading the stories in this edition of Red-tail News and remember to keep your eyes and ears peeled for the sights and sounds of our beautiful cockatoo.

Thanks, Skye



THE 2023 ANNUAL COUNT IS ON

The Recovery Team and BirdLife Australia are again seeking volunteers for the South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo Annual Count. In 2023, the Count will be conducted on Saturday, 6th May. The Recovery Team is hoping for a good number of volunteers to assist to locate as many flocks as possible across South-eastern South Australia and South-western Victoria. The count will take place at more than 60 sites of stringybark forest ranging between Keith and Mount Gambier in SA, to Nelson and Little Desert National Park in Victoria.

Last year, we counted about 1,200 birds on the day. Participating in the count is simple, all you need is a: survey buddy or group, binoculars, a love of the outdoors and a vehicle, preferably 4WD. Volunteers will be allocated a site to cover via vehicle, looking and listening out for the distinctive call of the cockatoo. Volunteers need no prior experience for surveying the birds but are required to become familiar with what the cockies look and sound like before the count so they are able to tell the difference between Red-tails and Yellow-tails on the day. These birds are often mistaken for each other, so to become more familiar with the difference between the two birds, head to our website at www.redtail.com.au. Landholders with stringybark on their property are also encouraged to search their own property. You can

request a particular area to search when you register or nominate to search your own property. Red-tails regularly use stock troughs as watering points and feed in stringybark trees on private land. These areas are usually inaccessible to our counters so we warmly encourage landholders (and other community members) to report sightings and check out your troughs at the start and end of the day.

The main reason for conducting the annual count each year is to identify large flocks of Red-tails across the range. Flock counts are undertaken after the annual count and are guided by where volunteers spot large flocks on the day. Flock counts provide us an important indication of breeding success in previous years.

To register your interest or to find out more please visit our website at www.redtail.com.au.

Registrations are accepted up to two weeks prior to the count; however, we recommend registering early to secure your preferred search area. A package of survey instructions and a map will be sent out to registered volunteers in the fortnight leading up to the count.

Thank you and good luck to the volunteers!

Skye McPherson, Birdlife Australia



*Fresh chewings on roadsides are an indication birds are nearby.
Photo credit: Skye McPherson*



Fresh chewings of green stringybark capsules. Photo credit: Skye McPherson

ATTENTION: GLENELG HOPKINS LANDHOLDERS!

Are you a landholder in the South-west corner of Victoria? If so, you may live within the distribution of the endangered south-eastern red-tailed black-cockatoo.

The Glenelg Hopkins CMA and Greening Australia are currently looking for landholders to help with the recovery of this species through the revegetation of feeding habitat.

If you own land within the area highlighted on this map and would like to have patches of Stringybark feeding habitat revegetated on your property, we want to hear from you.

Areas of habitat do not need to be great swathes of land, small areas dotted around the species distribution area are just as valuable to the recovery of this bird as large areas.

For more information, or to register your interest please contact either Ben Zeeman at the Glenelg Hopkins CMA (0411 311 328, b.zeeman@ghcma.vic.gov.au) or Dave Warne at Greening Australia (DWarne@greeningaustralia.org.au).

This project is funded through the Australian Government's National Landcare Program.

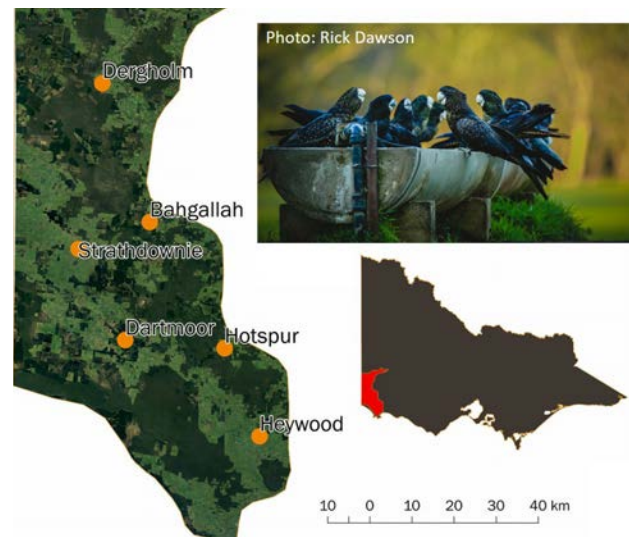


Photo Credit: Map courtesy of Glenelg Hopkins CMA.

SOUGHT AFTER SIGHTINGS

Throughout the year, the Recovery Team encourages members of the public to report any sightings of the endangered South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo in preparation for the 2023 Annual Count. At this time of year (Autumn) it is extra important to assist us to determine where the cockies are currently located so that we can maximise the number of birds counted on Annual Count day by strategically placing our volunteers. We are particularly interested in reports of Red-tails drinking at troughs or dams, as this is where we tend to count larger numbers of birds. The success of the count relies a lot on this information. Call us on 1800 262 062 or submit a sightings report via

the website www.redtail.com.au. When reporting a sighting, make sure to include your contact details, the date and time of the sighting, an estimate of the number of Red-tails observed, the location and grid reference for the sighting and some information about what the birds were doing eg drinking from trough, feeding. We look forward to receiving your reports!

This year we have already received 24 sighting reports from across the range, thank you for those who take the time to do so!

Using binoculars to take a photo of some Red-tails!

Photo credit: Skye McPherson



KARAK THE COCKATOO IS BACK!

Recovery Team staff and volunteers attended some of the local regional shows held earlier this year and really enjoyed the opportunity to get out and about amongst the community. On the 4th of March we headed to the Mundulla Show and enjoyed some perfect Mundulla weather and chatted to many local landholders and visitors. Around 60 kids also took part in the Bunyip Trail, where they collected our Red-tail tattoo and some interesting facts about the species.

On the 17th and 18th of March we headed to the South East Field Days in Lucindale. Luckily, we again had perfect weather conditions on both days which resulted in a huge numbers of landholders and members of the public dropping by to learn about the cockies, report their sightings, and have a friendly chat about how they can be involved in Red-tail activities. Once again we took part in the Blue Yakka Trail where we handed out tattoos, stickers and Red-tail pencils to an estimated 400 kids. We were joined by project partner Trees For Life at the stall, showcasing some flyers and brochures about Red-tail revegetation. There was strong interest in habitat restoration and protection from the public so the 'Communities helping Cockies' team answered lots of questions from landholders about what they can do to help the Red-tails. Karak the Cockatoo (who was also one of the mascots from the 2006 Commonwealth Games) also made special appearances on both days. Karak really helped spread the word about Red-tails and gave some much needed high fives and fist bumps to kids right across the Field Days site.

A huge thank you to our fantastic 'Red-tail Field Days Team' including Evan, Kerry, Bron, Emily and Sam for their help with the site this year, it looked amazing and we all had a great time! We would also like to give a big thank you to the Lucindale Scout Club for use of their magnificent marquee. Many thanks to everyone who visited our stall and had a chat with us; we are sure next year will be just as fun!

*Skye McPherson,
Birdlife Australia*



Skye and Emily work the stall at Lucindale.

Photo credit: Sam Rothe



Karak the Cockatoo meets some children at the South East Field Days

*Photo credit:
Sam Rothe*

GROWING FOOD FOR COCKIES

Red-tails are set to benefit from the next batch of stringybark seedlings, which have been growing prolifically over the last few months from seed germinated by local South East schools participating in the BirdLife Australia's 'Kids helping Cockies' Project.

Seven schools have helped to collect and germinate stringybark seed, collected from various locations around the South East. Schools participating include Allendale East Area School, Frances Primary School, Lucindale Area School, Nangwarry Primary School, Naracoorte South Primary School, Newbery Park Primary School and Tenison Woods College.

Of the schools involved, five participated in seed collection excursions to Nangwarry Native Forest Reserve, Eaglehawk Waterhole, Naracoorte Parklands and Loechel Park, while the remaining two schools were involved in-class seed sorting sessions.

Seed collection excursions not only provide students with the opportunity to collect seed directly from the trees, but to look for feeding signs (trash and chewings) the cockatoos leave behind, and for the birds themselves. On the rare occasion students are rewarded with all three!

Last year, Newbery Park Primary School students were thrilled to be able to observe a small flock of Red-tails feeding in stringybark on their excursion to Nangwarry NFR, while Frances Primary School spotted three Red-tails while collecting seed at Eaglehawk Waterhole.

Seeing Red-tails in their stringybark habitat boosts enthusiasm, helps students to strengthen their connection with the species

and reinforces the importance of their work and contribution in helping to shape a better future for our cockies.

Despite finding evidence of fresh signs, we weren't able to locate any cockatoos during our field excursions with Nangwarry Primary School and Lucindale Area School. However, both groups really enjoyed the opportunity to explore the stringybark forests and soak-up their surroundings.

Towards the end of Term 4, stringybark seed collected by students was sowed and allowed to germinate over summer holidays. Over the last few months, schools have been involved in maintenance sessions to thin out and transplant seedlings to ensure one plant per pot. Transplanting can be a tricky process especially for little hands, but all schools we visited have done a wonderful job with a high success rate to date.

It's anticipated more than 1000 stringybarks grown by students as part of this project will be planted out this winter. Students are particularly keen to participate in planting sessions and to get their hands dirty for a great cause this coming season.

If your school is interested in becoming involved in this project, please contact Bron Perryman on 0438 317 024 or email bronwyn.perryman@birdlife.org.au.

The BirdLife Australia 'Kids helping Cockies' Project is supported by the Limestone Coast Landscape Board through funding from the Australian Government.

Bron Perryman, Kids helping Cockies Coordinator



Frances Primary School spotted three Red-tails while collecting seed at Eaglehawk Waterhole. Photo Credit: Sarah Hinge



Tenison Woods College cleaning stringybark seed. Photo Credit: Tina Opperman

LANDSCAPE ECOLOGY AND NESTING COCKIES

I recently completed my Master's research with the University of Melbourne looking at predictors of the south-eastern red-tail black cockatoo nesting attempts and outcomes from a landscape ecology perspective. I aimed to develop a model for predicting the distribution of suitable nesting hollows within remnant vegetation blocks to help inform future nest box deployment. I also wanted to find out if this varying hollow availability, among other predictors, was a contributing factor to the distribution of historical nesting occurrences across the landscape. Additionally, I conducted bioacoustics monitoring at potential nesting trees to find out where birds were nesting over the 2021-22 breeding season and to try to identify the success or failure of breeding attempts and what might be explaining those outcomes.

Two new previously unidentified nesting locations were discovered and, between monitoring done for this study and that done by Richard Hill (DELWP), there were 14 active nest sites of which 6 were classified as failed, 1 successfully fledged and 5 had an unknown outcome over summer 2021-22. Combining these results with all nesting data since nest monitoring records began in 2017, where an outcome was able to be determined, resulted in a fledging success rate of 27.8%. However, the sample size (36 known outcomes since 2017) was insufficient to conduct meaningful analysis on potential drivers of nest failures, especially because most of these records lacked accurate data on the local food availability at the time of nesting (stringybark capsule density). This is one of the reasons finding nests each season is so important.

While the exact determinates of the high levels nesting failures remains elusive the analysis done on the distribution of all known nesting records, including those with unknown outcome, yielded several results. I surveyed hollow availability across the landscape within different vegetation and land use types to see how it contributes to nesting occurrences and affirmed and quantified the prevailing understanding that suitable nesting hollows primarily occur in large old river red gums, yellow gums and other 'gum' type eucalypts with large diameter, height and small canopy volumes. Modelling showed that suitable hollows occurred at highest densities in vegetation types associated with riparian zones and plains woodlands and where annual rainfall was higher and the time since fire was longer. These habitats are distinctly different from the drier stringybark dominated regions where the red tail forages for food. However in the south of the bird's range where there is higher rainfall and less fire some hollows do occur within stringybark trees themselves.

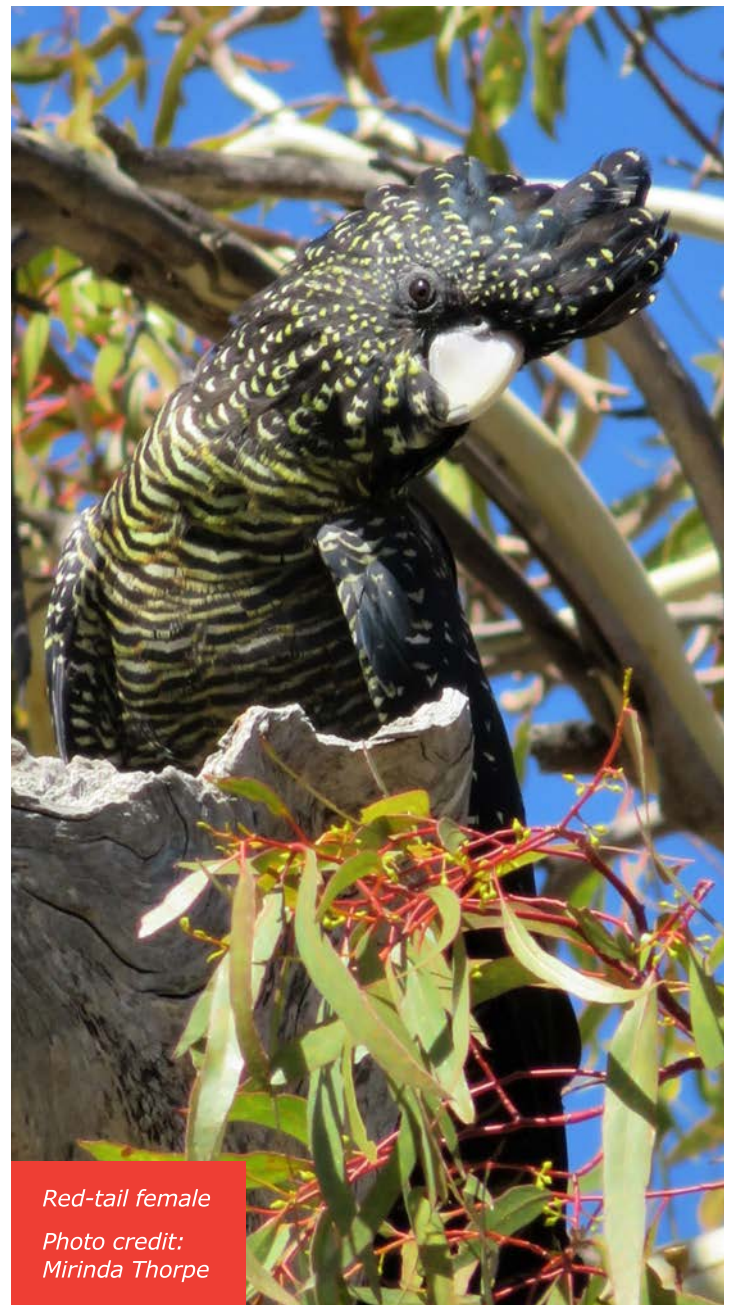
The distribution of suitable hollows in remnant vegetation did turn out to be a contributing factor in the likelihood of red tails nesting in any given 5km radius and this effect was primarily seen when an area also contained a significant proportion of stringybark forest providing important food supplies. The interaction between both these crucial and limiting resources, food and hollows, when they co-occur in sufficient densities, greatly increases the likelihood of nesting more than either resource alone. In addition to hollows in remnant vegetation, the density of paddock trees; a proxy for suitable hollows in farmland, the proportion of riparian associated vegetation types and the amount of water bodies were also all important contributors to the probability of nesting. Interestingly, areas covered by a Victorian reserves/parks were strong predictors of low nesting likelihood, implying that that our reserve network is failing to cover the habitat and vegetation types crucial for Red-tail breeding.

The interactions between hollows, food availability and other vegetation and landscape features tended to compound the

likelihood of nesting attempts which highlights not only the interconnected nature of ecosystems broadly but the critical balance required for the endangered South-eastern Red-tail to breed and flourish. These interactions and effects also differed between regions dominated by the two different stringybark species; *E. arenacea* and *E. baxteri*, highlighting the need to further our understanding of the distribution of these species and the nesting opportunities available when either species is currently fruiting.

In general, localised regions where there is an intersection between food-containing and hollow-containing vegetation, available water bodies and low fire frequency need to be identified, protected, and targeted for ongoing audio monitoring. As further data on nesting occurrences comes in we can hope to unravel the drivers of nest failures and target nesting boxes and protection efforts to areas where breeding should be successful but where suitable nesting hollows are scarce.

Oliver Wardle, University of Melbourne



Red-tail female

*Photo credit:
Mirinda Thorpe*

COMMUNITIES HELPING COCKIES ROUNDUP

It has been a busy past six months for the Communities Helping Cockies (Trees For Life) habitat team. Spring kicked off with a Bush Action Team event over three days in September where locals were joined by a bus load of enthusiastic volunteers from Adelaide and surrounds. A total of three hectares of stringybark woodland across two sites was cleared of boneseed and other woody weeds – an amazing effort! Many thanks to Kay and John Hole and Louise and Peter Stock for welcoming us onto their properties, and of course a very big thank you to all the volunteers who pitched in to help.

More recently, Trees For Life partnered with Nature Glenelg Trust to hold the inaugural Eaglehawk Waterhole Festival in late February. Eaglehawk Waterhole Restoration Reserve, located 8kms north of Frances near the SA/VIC border, is a haven for native flora and fauna including Red-tails. After a morning's hard work attending to tree guard maintenance, local volunteers were treated to a BBQ lunch and afternoon tour of the Reserve. Special thanks to Bryan Haywood, Andy Lines and the Nature Glenelg Trust team for hosting the event and sharing their knowledge and stories of the natural and cultural heritage of the area.

Looking ahead, the team is gearing up for a big planting season with seven new landholders joining the project. If you are interested in getting involved in the Communities Helping Cockies project either as a volunteer or landholder or both, please don't hesitate to get in touch. We're always on the lookout for more places to plant buloke and stringybark trees to increase Red-tail feeding habitat in South Australia.

We would also love to hear from landholders who are keen for assistance with weed control in remnant buloke and stringybark woodland on their properties.

*Emily Baldwin – Trees For Life Habitat Officer
EmilyB@treesforlife.org.au 0409 539 365*



*Bryan Haywood (Senior Ecologist, Nature Glenelg Trust) showing volunteers some interesting invertebrates at Eaglehawk Waterhole Restoration Reserve
Photo credit: Emily Baldwin*



Volunteers at the September Bush Action Team event getting stuck into boneseed removal

Photo credit: Natasha Davis

KERRY GILKES AND HER CHC 'FOOD LEGACY' FOR RED-TAILS

The Cockies helping Cockies helping Cockies Project was conceived by the Threatened Species Network in 2008 after a series of in-depth surveys with landholders in the Red-tail's range identified a local passion to conserve Red-tails and lots of practical advice to effectively support landholders to undertake the work. The advice was taken to heart and became the project's guiding principles. At the heart of the community's response was the importance of establishing a local landholder as the key point of contact and the hunt was on to find such a landholder with an appetite to learn lots more about Red-tail ecology and a willingness to make time in an already busy farming year to work with their local community in this way. All our Christmases came at once when Kerry Gilkes' name was suggested and she agreed to meet and learn a bit more – and she never looked back.

Over the following decade Kerry became a key architect and the main driver of the Cockies helping Cockies helping Cockies Project (C3) and she has been a tremendous source of advice, support and inspiration for a dynamic and growing network of landholders working to revegetate and fence stringybark habitat for Red-tails in South Australia and beyond.

Making the most of the project's momentum in 2012, Kerry worked with other Red-tail Recovery Team members to initiate the now equally successful Kids helping Cockies Project which has seen many schools across the Red-tail's range involve students to grow and plant stringybark trees as future food for the birds.

Kerry also spent almost a year in the SERTBC Project Coordinator role in 2016-17 while Bron Perryman was on maternity leave. During this time, Kerry proficiently navigated her way through an annual count, compiled newsletters, ran field day events, coordinated Recovery Team meetings and managed the recovery program - whatever Kerry puts her hands to, she does with purpose, passion and skill.

Both her work and the co-design principles underpinning the CHC Project were quickly noticed and she was asked to present at State and National Landcare conferences to share the success and lessons learned. Kerry's natural leadership skills were also recognised when she was appointed to the South East Natural Resources Management Board in 2016.

There are too many achievements to mention, but we'd like to make special mention of the trips Kerry organised for Red-tail landholders between 2010-15. These trips included travelling to Otway (Victoria) to meet with a farmer peer mentor network that was working together to conserve and restore

trees on their properties and to KI to learn more about a project to support controlled burns on private properties for conservation.

It was also an extraordinary moment when Red-tails were seen feeding on stringybark trees within one of the first demonstration revegetation sites delivered by the project, only nine years on, and then again more recently again in 2022.

Kerry has worked tirelessly and collaboratively with local landholders, tree growers and the wider community over the last 14 years to build and create a 'food-legacy' for our Red-tails. Since 2009, 528 ha of stringybark habitat has been revegetated and over 580 ha of remnant stringybark habitat fenced and protected across 304 sites within the cockatoo's range from Keith to Wye in SA as part of the CHC Project. The impact of this work extends well beyond the birds, helping to secure a brighter future for all species reliant on stringybark habitats.

She has built a wonderful rapport with her network of landholders who cannot speak highly enough of her enthusiasm, dedication, and support in making the project the success it is today. In 2018, Kerry helped produce a short video in conjunction with several landholders about the Cockies C3 Project, highlighting the core principles, objectives, successes and work undertaken to date. To view please visit: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SLxcU1cBsqq>.

Kerry has and will no doubt continue to make a significant contribution to Red-tail conservation, and the success of her community and peers. Even now, as she takes a step back from playing a main role, she continues to mentor and provide support and guidance to fellow staff. Kerry has always been such an absolute pleasure to work with and professional. She is highly skilled, generous, ridiculously hard working, and community minded.

Kerry has also been an extraordinarily strong advocate for the needs and perspectives of the farming community she has worked with over the last decade and is a well-respected, and much-adored member of her community and Recovery Team.

All the recovery work has benefited immeasurably from her contribution, and she, as we are, should be incredibly proud of her achievements! On behalf of the Red-tail community we'd like to take the opportunity to say thank you Kerry, and wish you all the best.



One of Kerrys original stringybark reveg sites near Lucindale
Photo Credit: Bron Perryman



Kerry planting stringybark seed with Naracoorte South Primary
Photo Credit: Naracoorte Herald



FUNDING ACKNOWLEDGMENT:

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A male displaying typical courting behaviour to a female by showing off his red tail feathers

Photo credit: Luke Leddy

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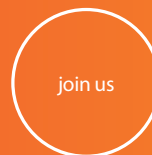
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