

Red-tail News

Issue 57 December 2023



Skye McPherson

HAPPY FESTIVE SEASON FROM THE RED-TAIL FLOCK!

Welcome to a special, online only, Xmas Red-tail update! The end of year has quickly approached and we just wanted to say a huge thank you for your support this year and give you a quick round up on what has been going on since the last newsletter.

The National Landcare Project (NLP2) came to an end this June. This project has resulted in huge achievements over the last five years, including a staggering monitoring effort with activities like flock counts and nest box monitoring. There was also a massive amount of community participation including five annual counts, tree planting and bush care weeding events.

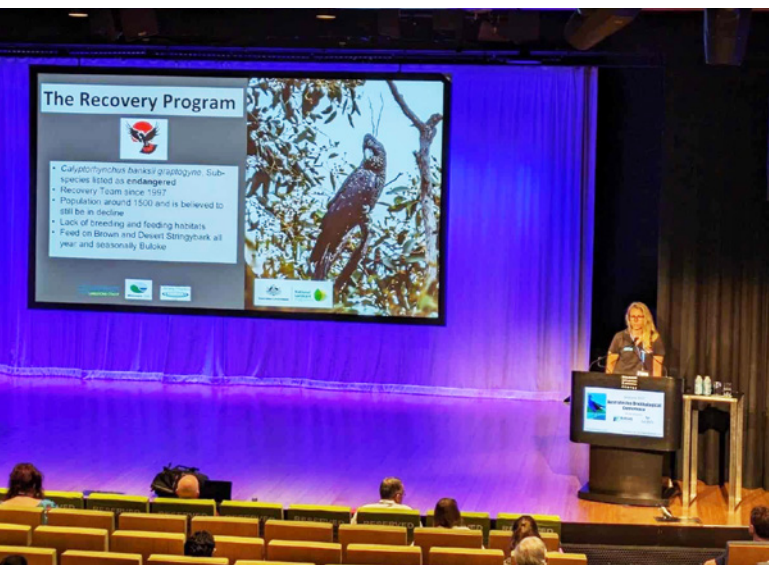
We will be continuing our journey in early 2024, moving onto the next stage of Red-tail recovery with our wonderful project partners the: Limestone Coast Landscape Board, Wimmera Catchment Management Authority and Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority.

Some personal highlights for the year from me include representing the Recovery Team at the Australasian Ornithological Conference in Brisbane in November, counting a flock of 300 Red-tails as they came in to drink at a dam in the Wimmera and seeing a female using a brand new nest box near Powers Creek. We also had a great turnout for the Annual Cocky Count in May with 128 volunteers searching the region. We counted 1,204 birds on the day, thank you again to everyone involved.

Lastly, I'd like to say thank you to the special people who kindly donated either financially and/or with their time to the project this year. We really do appreciate it and couldn't do it without you! Some significant contributors to the Recovery Team have also moved on recently from their roles including Abby Goodman, Communities Helping Cockies Coordinator with the Limestone Coast Landscape Board and Emily Baldwin, SE Cocky Habitat Officer, Trees For Life. Thank you to you both for your contributions to the project and all the best for your ventures going forward.

Wishing you all a fantastic festive season, see you in 2024!

Skye McPherson,
SeRtBC Project Coordinator



Presenting on an Australasian scale in Brisbane

birds are in our nature



A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Hi all, it's been another incredible year of effort from our very special Red-tail community with so many local schools and landholders being involved, feed and future nest trees being fenced and planted, new nests being found and protected, and another amazing turn out for the Annual Cocky Count and campout. The Recovery Team was also thrilled to complete a plan to guide Red-tail recovery over the next five years which will be open for comment through the Australian Government in 2024. It is such a privilege to be part of a community that is so passionate about their country, wildlife and each other and I hope you will all take a moment over the hard-earned Christmas break to celebrate the difference you've made to Red-tails and their special part of the world this year.

Wishing you all the best for a safe and happy festival season.

*Vicki-Jo Russell AM,
Chair SERTBC Recovery Team*

Photo: Vicki-Jo Russell AM



Photo credit: Luke Leddy



KIDS CONTINUE TO KICK GOALS FOR COCKIES

This year has seen eight local South East schools actively involved in learning about the habitat needs and threats to the birds, and propagating and planting stringybark seedlings at key revegetation sites.

Participating schools include Allendale East Area School, Frances Primary School, Lucindale Area School, Nangwarry Primary School, Naracoorte South Primary School, Newbery Park Primary School, Rendelsham Primary School and Tenison Woods College. Over winter, 162 students helped to plant out more 1790 trees, consisting of more than 500 stringybark trees at seven revegetation sites near Dismal Swamp, Frances, German Flat, Lucindale, Naracoorte and Penola. Almost all the stringybark seedlings planted had been propagated by the students from seed.

Excursions to sites to plant seedlings always proves popular with students, allowing them to get outside and engage with nature, learn new skills and take action for cockies. Students not only plant the seedlings but also assist with installing corflute and mesh guards to protect them from grazing herbivores. The beauty about this project is that the kids are involved in the entire process from seed to feed tree. It helps students to develop new skills, connect with their surroundings and take ownership of the project.

For the past five years, the 'Kids helping Cockies' project has been a component of the much larger federally funded project 'SA Communities helping Cockies': improving the trajectory of the nationally endangered SERTBC' which was supported by the Limestone Coast Landscape Board through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program. This project has been a joint partnership between Limestone Coast Landscape Board, BirdLife Australia, Zoos SA and Trees For Life. The project commenced in late 2018 with funding provided until the end of June 2023.

Over this time BirdLife Australia through 'Kids helping Cockies' has engaged with over 1930 students and 208 staff, parent helpers and landholders from twelve local South East schools. A total of 177 events consisting of presentations, seed collection, seed sowing and planting, seedling maintenance/thinning and planting at revegetation sites have been held over the five years. Students have helped to propagate thousands of stringybark seedlings and planted more than 2700 food trees for our endangered cockatoos through this project. It is a truly wonderful achievement and one where all the students and staff involved can be extremely proud of. Although external funding has now ceased, schools have continued to be supported over the last five months thanks to funds provided by BirdLife Australia. This has enabled presentations, seed collection and seed sowing events to continue with five schools, while awaiting the outcome of further funding announcements.

A highlight for one new school involved this season was a trip out to Nangwarry Native Forest Reserve to collect stringybark seed for propagation. Rendelsham Primary School students were thrilled to be able to watch and observe a small flock of Red-tails feeding quietly in the stringybark trees while collecting seed for the birds. For many students it was their first ever encounter with Red-tails and one which they will remember forever.

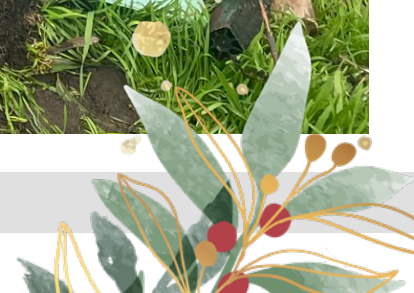
While the future of the Kids helping Cockies project is somewhat uncertain, we hope to be able to continue working with many of our schools and students over at least the coming year to plant out the stringybark seedlings that will germinate over summer from trays of seed sown over the last few weeks. We wait with anticipation.

Bron Perryman

Kids helping Cockies Coordinator



Bron working with students from Naracoorte South Primary School
Photo credit: Michael Schultz



COCKIES HELPING COCKIES

For many years, landholders across the South East of South Australia have been helping to revegetate and protect hundreds of hectares of critical stringybark feeding habitat for the South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo through the very successful 'Cockies helping Cockies' project.

This long-running project has some impressive runs on the board with 520 hectares of stringybark habitat revegetated and 650 hectares of remnant stringybark habitat fenced and protected on private land since it commenced back in 2009, making it the largest landscape scale revegetation project undertaken for Red-tails across their range.

The results of this work speak for themselves with Red-tails found feeding in stringybark revegetation planted only nine years earlier (one of the first demonstration sites established in 2009); and it's not just the cockatoos who are benefitting. Plantings are diverse and multi-purpose providing an array of benefits to landholders and farm productivity, such as shelter and shade for stock, improved erosion control and foraging habitat for native insectivores including microbats which help control pest insects in and around crops.

Over the last five years (2018-2023), the 'Cockies Helping Cockies' project, run by Zoos SA since 2012, has been funded through the Australian Government's National Landcare Program and supported by the Limestone Coast Landscape Board in partnership with BirdLife Australia and Trees for Life. During this period, Zoos SA has revegetated 286.2 ha of stringybark habitat and fenced 310.8 ha of existing stringybark remnants from stock. This has included the establishment of new shelter belts, paddock trees and patches, infill of existing stringybark remnants and installation of 1785 mallee mesh guards to protect from browsing kangaroos and stock.

Ninety-two landholders have been engaged over the period, with an incredible 19,678 stringybark seedlings (Brown and Desert Stringybark) planted across 187 sites within the Red-tail's range in SA.

This year alone (2022-23) saw 16,855 mixed species planted of which 5,669 were stringybark seedlings established across 20 private landholder properties, totalling 59 hectares of revegetation. Furthermore, four high quality stringybark remnants totalling 176 ha were fenced and protected from stock. In addition to the trees planted over 2022-23, a further 3348 trees were replanted to back-fill any obvious gaps found at existing revegetation sites planted since 2019. Sites to be replanted each year are identified through plant survival counts undertaken in March-April to determine percentage success. This year we recorded wonderful success with 80%

of sites (27 sites) planted the previous year (2022) having greater than 80% seedling survival. This success has been attributed to the consistent rainfall over winter, spring and summer 2022-23.

Revegetation efforts have been targeted in areas supporting existing stringybark habitat and/or where birds are known to feed and frequent. They complement and build on previous efforts working from property to property, linking roadsides, existing remnants and conservation reserves to ensure habitat connectivity and continuity across the landscape. A total of 79 Red-tail habitat management plans have been developed over the five years. Habitat management plans are tailored to suit individual properties and are developed in conjunction with the landholders to ensure mutual benefits to both farmers and cockies.

The Zoos SA 'Cockies Helping Cockies' Project model is unique, cost-efficient, and fit for purpose. It has been shaped and moulded to meet both the needs of landholders and best practice revegetation methods/principles. Some of the aspects that makes this project appealing to landholders is the ease, flexibility in the scale and size of plantings, follow-up maintenance and collaborative approach taken to ensure plantings are successful. While each property and site contribute individually, it's not until these are viewed 'collectively' that you see and understand the scale and enormity of these efforts in helping to build, reconnect and secure food highways for the birds across the landscape.

Project staff would like to say a special thanks to all our landholders involved in the project and to our local nursery growers Ralph Scheels (Eucaleuca Native Services, Naracoorte), Kathy Bell and Doug Nicholls (Southern Ground, Kingston) and Peter Feast (Mimosa Farm Trees, Wye), as well as Trees for Life (Adelaide) and BirdLife Australia's Kids Helping Cockies Project for supplying the trees for the project. Without your support this project would not be possible.

Although the current five year commitment of funding has now come to an end, we hope through future funding bids and announcements we can continue to support landholders to undertake critical stringybark revegetation and protection activities through this wonderful project for years to come.

If you are interested in undertaking stringybark habitat restoration on your property, please contact Bron Perryman on 0438 317 024 to discuss how this might be achievable.

*Bron Perryman, Habitat Contractor,
Zoos SA Cockies Helping Cockies*



*A Cockies Helping
Cockies site*

*Photo credit:
Bron Perryman*



ENVIRONMENTAL RESTORATION FUND SUCCESS!

In 2022, the Recovery Team was awarded an Environmental Restoration Fund Grant from the Australian Government to maintain and replace some of the original nest boxes in the landscape. We performed an audit on 50 nest boxes which had been installed in the late 90's/early 2000's to determine what condition they were in. The boxes were found to be in highly variable states with some requiring removal, some maintenance and some functioning well and we had a chance to learn much more about a range of environmental factors that contributed to this.

The grant also allowed us to install 50 new boxes in live trees at these sites to replace older boxes as required. At one particular site near Powers Creek, SW Vic, we observed a female using a brand new box within two weeks of installation. This was very exciting! We have also placed audio recorders on all of these boxes to monitor use and better understand breeding success. With the breeding season running into March, we hope to get these results by the middle of next year.



A female perched on the top of a new nest box and watched me while I installed an audiomoth on the tree

Photo Credit: Skye McPherson

FUNDING ACKNOWLEDGMENT:

BirdLife Australia's SERTBC Recovery Program is supported by the Limestone Coast Landscape Board, Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority and Wimmera Catchment Management Authority in partnership with Trees For Life, Zoos SA, Greening Australia, Trust for Nature, Barengi Gadgin Land Council and Kowree Farm Tree Group through funding from the Australian Government.

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Skye McPherson

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