

CONSERVATION CORNER

A TALE OF TWO COCKATOOS – Pt 1

IMPACTS OF BUSHFIRES ON THE EYRE PENINSULA YELLOW-TAILED BLACK-COCKATOO

By Sarah Way, DEH Threatened Fauna Officer, Port Lincoln

The January 2005 'Black Tuesday' bushfire had a devastating impact on the communities of southern Eyre Peninsula. The fire burnt an estimated 78,000 hectares of the predominantly agricultural landscape on Eyre Peninsula, approximately 300 kilometres west of Adelaide. Approximately 14,000 hectares of remnant native vegetation was burnt. Most of these remnants were small isolated patches connected, in varying degrees, by strips of roadside vegetation.

The fire ground contained the only known breeding habitat of the critically endangered Eyre Peninsula population of the Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo (EPYTBC) - the Sugar Gum (*Eucalyptus cladocalyx*) woodlands of the Koppio Hills.

The entire breeding habitat throughout the Koppio Hills was burnt, including known and used nest trees fenced remnants and revegetation areas.

The fire occurred during the birds' breeding season and three active nests were destroyed: two chicks and one fertile egg were lost. Unlike Glossy Black-Cockatoos who lay only one egg, Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos lay two eggs. However, even if the second egg hatches, the chick does not usually survive to fledging stage.

Luckily, the second fertile egg was salvaged from two of these nests during nest monitoring before the fire. These eggs hatched successfully and, consequently, two chicks did survive this season, albeit to join the captive population at the Gorge Wildlife Park in Adelaide.

As the majority of Eyre Peninsula Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo habitat occurs on private land, the habitat rehabilitation program will be gradual and will be dictated by the feelings and recovery of EP landholders. However, requests have already been received for advice on fencing and

biodiversity recovery so we are optimistic that, with time, some positives will come from this terrible fire event.

Landholder observations have been crucial to understanding the birds' responses to the fire. Since the fires, the Port Lincoln DEH office has received 25 EPYTBC observations. There are at least 19 adult birds and one juvenile from last year remaining in the general area.

We would like to thank the Eyre Peninsula community, Eyre Peninsula Natural Resource Management Group and Nature Foundation SA for their continued support.

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UPDATE ON THE GLOSSY BLACK-COCKATOO COMMENCEMENT OF THE 2005 NESTING SEASON

The 2005 nesting season is now under way with pairs of birds actively seeking nesting hollows to lay their egg and rear their chick over the next few months. Volunteers across the Island have been treated to courtship displays of tail fanning, males feeding the females and mutual preening.

Volunteers have been out in the field monitoring known nest sites and watching for new nest hollows during the late afternoon and early evening. It is during this time that the male will return to the nest and call the female off the nest to feed her. This is usually an indication that an egg has been laid.

New nesting trees are protected from possum predation with corrugated iron collars and observations made on the progress of the nest.

Last season there were three previously unknown nests located and the trees protected from possums. An additional three unused hollows in trees that had already been protected were also located. This season there have already been four new hollows located and protected. Let's hope it's a great season for the Glossies!

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