

Scrub-birds established in new home

WITH help from the Channel 10 helicopter, five male noisy scrub-birds were translocated to Bald Island Nature Reserve in June.

When re-discovered in 1961, there were fewer than 100 scrub-birds left in one colony at what is now Two Peoples Bay Nature Reserve, 40 km east of Albany.

Since then, the implementation of a fire management plan at Two Peoples Bay led to an increase in numbers of scrub-birds, and to the establishment of two new populations through natural spread.

Translocation began in 1983, with a population being established at Mt Manypeaks within Waychinicup National Park, and a further population has since been established at Mt Taylor, in Gull Rock National Park, just to the east of Albany.

Breeding territories

In 1991, there were 293 singing males defending breeding territories, compared with about 40 in 1961.

Not all translocations have been successful.

Attempts to establish scrub-birds in Nuyts Wilderness in the Walpole-Nornalup National Park and near Owingup Swamp in Quarram Nature Reserve have failed for no apparent reason.

In 1991, the Noisy Scrub-bird Recovery Team was set up comprising representatives of CALM (Albany District and Research Division), CSIRO Division of Wildlife and Ecology, the Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service, the Shire of Albany and noisy scrub-bird volunteers.

A recovery plan has been almost finalised.

Earlier this year, permission was gained from CALM and the National Parks and Nature Conservation Authority to try a translocation to Bald Island Nature Reserve, about 25 km east of Two Peoples Bay.

The advantages of Bald

by Andrew Burbidge

Island include protection from fire and the absence of introduced predators.

Initial reconnaissance by Alan Danks, the CALM officer in charge of the project, revealed that suitable scrub-bird habitat existed in the southern parts of Bald Island.

The problem was how to get the birds to the island in mid-winter - the only time that scrub-birds can be captured.

Stress

A sea voyage would have been difficult, if not impossible, because of winter storms and would have meant considerable stress for the birds, not to mention the people involved.

The only feasible means seemed to be by helicopter, the cost of which was beyond the resources of the Recovery Team.

Fortunately, Perth's Channel 10 agreed to provide a helicopter at minimal cost to CALM in return for exclusive rights to the story.

At the time, CALM had a request from the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union that we facili-

tate a visit to Two Peoples Bay by well-known ornithologist and comedian Bill Oddie, who was in Australia to promote bird conservation.

Bill's presence increased the appeal of the project for Channel 10, who ran a major feature during their news on June 16.

The team set up to capture scrub-birds for translocation to Bald Island this year comprised Alan Danks and Dave Wilson (Two Peoples Bay Nature Reserve), Ian Wheeler (Manjimup Research), Peter Cale (volunteer) and Clare Welbon, an Honours student at Murdoch University who is studying scrub-bird food requirements.

Despite strong winds for several days before the helicopter arrived, five males were captured and flown to Bald Island, then released to try out their new home.

Only males are selected for the first year of a translocation project.

If the males are still present on Bald Island in the winter of 1993, females and further males will be moved next year.

Does anyone have a spare helicopter they can lend us next year?



Reserves officer Alan Danks loads a transfer box with two scrub-birds into the Channel 10 helicopter.

Photo by Andrew Burbidge