

NUMBERS OF THE RARE NOISY SCRUB-BIRD INCREASE

At Two Peoples Bay Nature Reserve east of Albany numbers of the Noisy Scrub-bird are increasing. Scientists from the Department of Fisheries and Wild-

life report that birds can now be heard singing in moist and densely vegetated areas around Lake Gardner and Moates Lake.

This movement of birds out of their main habitat on the Mount Gardner peninsula, is the result of effective fire control, part of a management programme put into operation in 1971. Since then areas basically suitable to the Noisy Scrub-bird which previously suffered frequent fires have grown back. They are now dense enough to provide shelter and food for the birds.

Two Peoples Bay and a view across the dense scrub to Mt. Gardner. Mt. Gardner (408 m) dominates the eastern part of the Nature Reserve and forms a peninsula extending in a south-easterly direction into the Southern Ocean. Most of the Noisy Scrub-birds live in the densely vegetated gullies in this region. The area resounds with their song, especially in the spring.



Fires occur frequently in this type of coastal heath and it is a common practice to burn the country regularly every five years, however, research has shown that too frequent burns ruin the habitat for many birds including the Noisy Scrub-bird.

The Noisy Scrub-bird was generally thought to be extinct until its rediscovery in 1961. Up until 1973 the population remained fairly stable at between 40 and 50 pairs of birds. Since 1973, 2 years after the policy of no burning was adopted, the numbers of breeding pairs have nearly doubled. Today there are 72 breeding pairs plus about 20 non-breeding males which are holding territories. Each breeding male bird requires a territory of about 10 hectares, so population pressure is forcing young males out from the Mount Gardner peninsula into new areas where they can establish their own territories. It remains to be seen whether the birds will eventually move even further afield into areas outside the Nature Reserve.

However the frequent burning of the coastal heathland makes most areas unsuitable.

The Department of Fisheries and Wildlife is cautiously optimistic that numbers of Noisy Scrub-birds will continue to increase. But there is a limit to the numbers the Nature Reserve can support which brings up the question of whether other areas can be found and a separate colony of birds established. Any new area would have to be managed and fires prevented.

Three other rare bird species on Two Peoples Bay Nature Reserve are also increasing in numbers. These birds—the Western Whip-bird, the Brown Bristle-bird and the Southern Emu-wren—all require dense vegetation and frequent burning destroys their habitat.

If we want populations of these rare birds to spread outside the Two Peoples Bay Nature Reserve to other areas research has shown that fires on coastal heathlands will have to be minimised.



Noisy Scrub-bird (*Atrichornis clamosus*)

Photo Graham Chapman