

WALPOLE BRISTLEBIRDS DOING WELL – DESPITE THE FIRE!

Bristlebirds are still singing well in the Nuyts Wilderness in Walpole-Nornalup National Park even though the extensive wildfire in March last year burnt much of their habitat.

During 1999 and 2000, CALM staff and volunteers translocated 15 Western Bristlebirds from Two Peoples Bay to long-unburnt vegetation in Nuyts Wilderness as part of the recovery efforts for this threatened species.

Then, in March 2001, an extensive wildfire burnt the release site and much of the surrounding area. Fortunately, some of the birds had already dispersed several kilometres to the west, near where the fire was finally contained.

In September 2001 we carried out intensive monitoring of the site when Allan Burbidge and Neil Hamilton, from CALM's Wildlife Research Centre, joined Isaac Hatch (Walpole District) and Ted Middleton (CALM volunteer) to follow up earlier reports and map the occurrence of singing birds.

The result was extremely pleasing – we recorded five male and at least two female birds. Even if there hadn't been a wildfire, this would have been a very encouraging result.

Most birds were in a buffer strip burnt three years ago, and one was in older vegetation. All were near the fire boundary. Observations from this project show that bristlebirds do not need fire

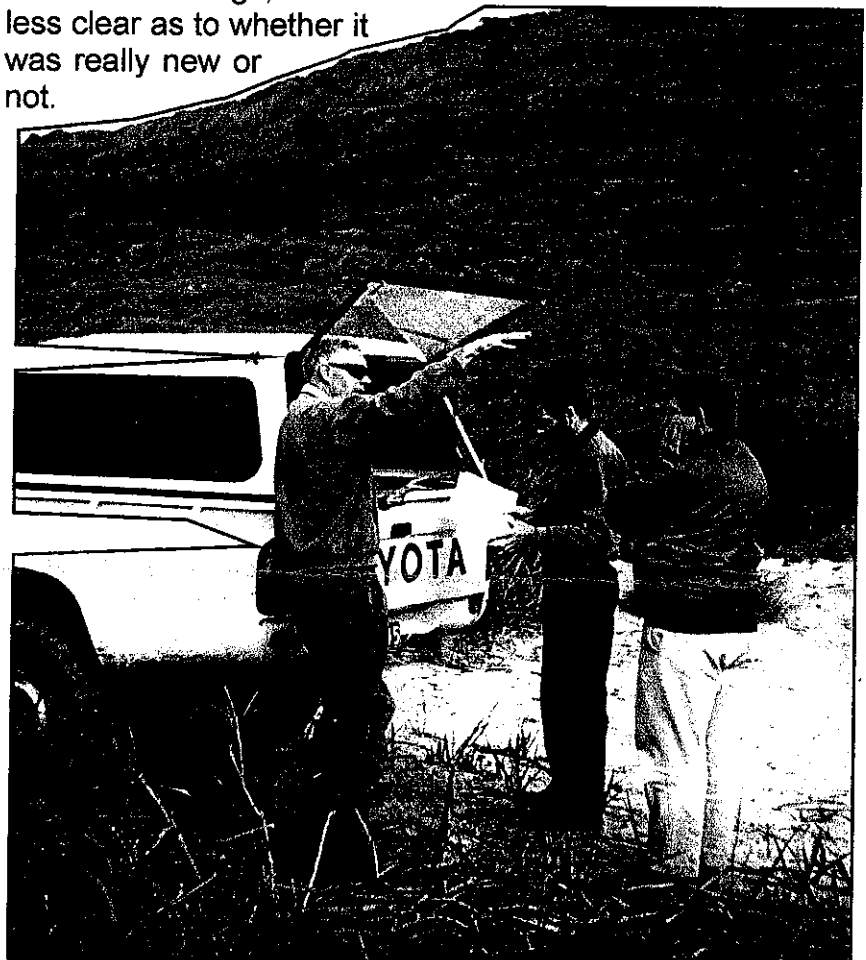
(they do well in long unburnt vegetation) but extensive fire can be a major problem. It is indeed fortunate that the fire was stopped where it was – if it had gone any further west, we may have lost all the bristlebirds in Nuyts.

Since then, there has been more good news – in January this year, Ted found another bird calling west of Point Nuyts, some distance from where the others had been located in September (we did not hear bristlebirds in this area in September). He also heard what was possibly another new bird, but this was in the vicinity of earlier recordings, so it is less clear as to whether it was really new or not.

In any case, despite some small difficulties in detail, the overall monitoring results are highly promising and pleasing – due in large part to the tremendous assistance and support provided by volunteers and park neighbours.

We will be monitoring at Walpole again this spring, and once the results are available, the recovery team will decide on the next move – do we put more birds in at this site? or do we find a new translocation site?

Allan Burbidge



Ted Middleton, Allan Burbidge and Isaac Hatch discussing the morning's survey results.
Photo by Neil Hamilton