

South Coast Threatened Birds News

A newsletter about the conservation of threatened birds on the south coast of Western Australia

GROUND PARROT FARES WELL—BRENT BARRETT

Wow, do you know whatever happened to that guy with the dreads? ...you know the one. He photographed that parrot species or something. It was in the paper last year. He was on the news. What? you don't remember him? Well, who does I suppose. It was a long time ago. Whatever his name was left us, ran home, turned his back on the birds. Or did he?

No is the answer. Yes I have returned to New Zealand but I haven't stopped caring about the fate of the Western Ground Parrot or the CALM project or the Friends group that are charged with securing the future of this cryptic and endearing bird. How can I call it endearing you may ask? I mean it flies at night, calls at dark, and is never ever seen by anyone for

more than a half a minute. That is technically true. But on the 5th of October 2005 the evening before my 30th birthday I discovered that the Western Ground Parrot does not listen to popular scientific theory. Quite the contrary really. As David Chemello (CALM Technical Officer) and Karl Edwards (Field Assistant) can attest. On this peculiar day an event occurred which burnt itself into my memory in much the same way as the moment I found my first Kakapo nest. Let me set the scene. It's 3pm on a warm October day in the Fitzgerald River National Park where we have been working in the same sub-population for three months. We were making great leaps in our understanding of call dynamics and nest site behaviour but I wanted a finale, after all I was

about to retire as Project Leader. I had come into the bush three days earlier than planned due to my staffs recent encounter with a flying bird which responded rather well to a playback session. We had worked the same area for two afternoons to no avail.

continued page 9.....

Inside this issue:

Darling Range Wildfire

Nuytsland Ground Parrot survey

Noisy Scrub-bird

Darling Range update

That Ground Parrot photo!

Introducing Mike

Project Phoenix

And lots more stories !



Brent & Felix the kakapo, Anchor Island, NZ

A BIG APOLOGY!

The first six months of 2006 have been extremely busy, with staff changes, wildfire in the Darling Range, Ground Parrot surveys and preparations for scrub-bird translocations and the continuing Project Phoenix work.

As a result the South Coast Threatened Birds Newsletter is somewhat later than usual, but instead of bringing you up to speed with 2006 as well we thought it would be better to keep you all in suspense for next year!

We've said farewell to Neil Scott and Neal Henshaw, and welcomed Mike Barth, Simon Cherriman and Chris Powell to the team.

Needless to say the next issue will be full of more great tales – scrub-birds translocated to the Porongurup National Park, with luck a Western Ground Parrot nest will be found, and no doubt more exciting news.

Stay tuned.

Sarah

WILDFIRE IN THE DARLING RANGE - Sarah Comer & Melissa Danks

On 22nd January 2006, a fire was deliberately lit on the eastern side of the Harvey River just out of Collie. Unfavourable weather conditions resulted in the fire spreading very quickly and also hampering containment efforts. This wildfire, contained on 26th January, burnt an area of 11,090 hectares, including private property, CALM-managed land and Alcoa mining lease.

Several Noisy Scrub-bird release sites were affected by the fire. Interestingly, during the fire, some experienced staff reported scrub-bird calls in two areas not previously known to contain scrub-birds.

Several days after the fire, a team from the south coast arrived in the Darling Range to investigate the impact of the fire on the Darling Range NSB population. The survey focussed on release site areas impacted by the fire, sites active during 2005 and the two new areas where birds were reported to be calling.

The riparian vegetation zone, which contains the only scrub-bird habitat in the Darling Range, burnt with very high intensity, leaving no unburnt patches of habitat. Four (of eight) NSB release sites were impacted, in-

cluding Sixty-one Form and Chasede Road gully (both partially burnt) and King Jarrah and Tiger Road (both completely burnt). Though no scrub-birds



LESS THAN A MONTH AFTER THE WILDFIRE THE FIRST GREEN SHOOTS CAN BE SEEN ON NAMBUCCA FORM, NORTH OF THE SIXTY-ONE FORM RELEASE SITE.

have been heard at either Tiger Road or Chasede Road for several years, a territorial male scrub-bird was singing at King Jarrah during winter 2005.

Three of the NSB sites that were active in 2005 remain intact. The Sixty-one Form release site was largely unaffected, but the creek system which connects this site to the Nambuca Form site was

burnt. The West Samson site, within the mine envelope, also remained unburnt.

The two scrub-bird calls heard in new areas during the fire event were also investigated, but no further calls were recorded.

However, on 17th February 2006, Dick Rule, Mavis Russell, Frank Pridham and Bill Smart of the Mandurah Bird Group listened for scrub-birds at one of the new areas. The group heard several territorial male calls – very exciting! This was a very valuable listening session.

We hope to have a clearer picture of the impact of this fire on the Darling Range Noisy Scrub-bird population after the survey work during the 2006 breeding season, when males will be actively defending territories through song.

It is also hoped that these surveys will yield a more conclusive answer on whether the scrub-bird at Nambuca Form is a new scrub-bird. This is especially important as the location of the January 2006 fire scar means there is now no longer a continuous habitat corridor connecting the two sites (see page 5 'A New Territorial Male NSB?').

Finding Western Ground Parrots in Nuytsland Nature Reserve – Brenda Newbey

In June 2005 a population of Western Ground Parrots (WGP) was located in Nuytsland Nature Reserve (NNR). To accomplish this was not easy and good fortune and good training played a role.

Ground Parrots had not been located in Cape Arid National Park (CANP) since 1989 despite some dedicated searches. In 2002 there were two extensive fires in that reserve. There had been a big fire in NNR in 1998.

In 2003, a wide-scale search for the elusive parrots was undertaken in the hope that any remaining WGPs would have congregated in the few areas of suitable habitat. One of these was along Poison Creek Road in CANP and had been known as WGP habitat in the 1980s so it was very exciting for the group to find WGPs there again. The remainder of the 11 day trip was dedicated to searching further afield in locations suggested by Allan Rose, long-term ranger in CANP.

For over a week the surveys produced negative results, but on the last morning for Arnold Morales and myself, Arnold heard a clear 'classic rising' WGP call (Arnold is an extreme non-morning person, a visitor to Australia, not a birder: he had come for the unusual adventure and to do something for the environment) After checking that no-one had been playing a call tape, he locked eyes with Shapelle McNee, one of the trip

leaders, and said 'Find that bird.' That evening three observers, placed separately around Arnold's call location, all heard a WGP call, and so the record of the easternmost WGP ever was confirmed. Unfortunately, there was no time to further investigate the tantalizing possibility of a population of WGPs being so far east.

In 2005 Birds Australia Western Australia Inc., who had secured the funding for the 2003 trip, suggested that they might seek further funding for WGP work. The project 'Search for Western Ground Parrots in Nuytsland Nature Reserve' was planned and funding from *lotterywest* was obtained.

The first trip was in May 2005. To start, we intensively surveyed the area where Arnold's bird had been. Only an occasional call was heard, but not predictably in one place and never more than one bird at a time. Searches further afield yielded nothing definite. Despite even more intensive searching, a second trip in June failed to find any WGPs in the heathland where Arnold's bird had been, which was disappointing.

A different piece of habitat about 10 km from the first was accessed, and surveyed for the first time (This habitat had also been pointed out by Allan Rose as potentially interesting for WGP searching) Two of the four surveyors heard WGPs and this time each heard more than one bird. Access was a problem but

on subsequent days, WGPs were heard from an area of about four square km. The survey was not completed before it was necessary to leave due to more rain approaching.

Fortunately there was sufficient grant money remaining to run a third trip. This was to have been in November but wet conditions made it necessary to cancel. A trip has now been arranged for March. Hopes are that the newly found population is still where it was nine months ago so that it can be further documented. Additionally more survey time will be devoted to exploring previously unsearched sites.

It seems quite remarkable to me that Arnold's confidence in the single call that he heard has led to so much follow-up action and, at last, the desired successful result.

Arnold's bird remains the easternmost WGP.

Brenda Newbey

PS— The population proved not to be where it had been in June. Despite a wide-ranging search we did not find more than one or two Ground Parrots and certainly not a population.

PPS—see the next issue for an update on the next trip to try to find this Ground Parrot population!

Singing Noisy Scrub-birds- Abby Berryman

Well, another year has past and I've spent plenty more time at Two Peoples Bay with the Noisy Scrub-birds. The major project for the year was to do some radio-tracking to see what the scrub-birds get up to when they aren't singing, and to make sure that it's the same bird singing from the same spot each day. All up we caught three male scrub-birds – I know it doesn't sound like a lot but believe me, it wasn't for lack of trying! Many mornings were too wet, too windy or too sunny to catch a scrub-bird (it has to be just right, scrub-birds are tricky little devils to catch!). And even when we did get a suitable morning we weren't always successful - sometimes they just weren't interested!

For those of you who aren't familiar with the method used to catch a scrub-bird, it involves using playback to lure the scrub-bird into a modified mist-net – a process that may take a few minutes or a few hours (or not happen at all!) depending on how wary the scrub-bird is. It takes 2 people – one to do the playback, and the other to pull the string when, or if, the scrub-bird hits the net, trapping it within a pocket of net. So, many

hours were spent sitting very still in cramped hides at each end of the net (it's quite amusing when you go to stand up and find your legs have gone to sleep and don't work very well



ABBY BANDING THE TERRITORIAL MALE NO. 43.
SEE PAGE 6 FOR THIS BIRD'S
EXCITING TALE!

anymore!).

The highlight of the year was catching the scrub-bird from territory 43 – see page 6 for the story of this bird.

As it turned out, number 43 was quite a lazy bird. It wasn't uncommon for him to spend several hours at a time in the same spot, something that on several occasions made me worry that

his transmitter had gotten caught up on something, or that the transmitter had come off. But invariably when I went to investigate I would get a sound scolding for disturbing his afternoon siesta.

In contrast, the scrub-bird I radio-tracked in territory 42 was very active. At times he would travel a few hundred metres quite rapidly, leaving me struggling to keep up, fighting my way through thick scrub with all my gear, trying not to get too tangled up in it. He also worried me at times; one day in particular I thought I had lost him. It was a particularly wet and windy day (not very pleasant weather to be out in) and I wanted to check on him and make sure he was alright. After about an hour of searching all the usual spots, I eventually picked up a weak signal. I found him tucked up nice and warm in a dense thicket up on the ridge. I, on the other hand, was not nice and warm but rather cold, windblown and wet.

More radio-tracking is planned for this year – including plans to radio-track a female or two – something that will no doubt keep me busy!

Darling Range Scrub-bird Update : Melissa Danks

2005 surveys

The scrub-bird team surveyed all Darling Range release sites in 2005, and with the help of local volunteers all eight sites were visited at least twice.

Sixty-one Form, King Jarrah West and West Samson continued to support singing males, but the heavy rain last year flooded net lines and meant we didn't get a chance to catch any birds.

A new territorial male !?

During the 2005 winter surveys, a territorial male scrub-bird was newly recorded at Nambuca

Form, a previously unoccupied location. Attempts were made to clarify whether this was actually a new bird, or one of the two birds heard during 2004 at Sixty-one Form, which was directly linked to this new area by a habitat corridor approximately 10 km riparian vegetation along the creek system. Calls were heard at one or the other of the two sites during each 2005 survey trip, but never at both sites simultaneously, and attempts to capture scrub-birds at these sites were unsuccessful. Recordings of territorial calls at both sites were made and analysed by PhD student Abby Berryman. A high level of call similarity sug-

gested the possibility of one bird moving between the two sites. Alternatively it is also possible that there are two birds and the song similarity is a result of contact between them.

If this scrub-bird is a new individual, it would indicate that scrub-birds are breeding successfully in the Darling Range. This mystery can only be solved if the bird is captured. All translocated birds had leg bands, therefore any unbanded bird would indicate new offspring.

In 2006 attempts will again be made to capture the birds in this area.



AFTER THE FIRE:: ABBY AND NEAL AT THE KING JARRAH FORM SITE, 31ST JANUARY 2006.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES IN 2006

Western Ground Parrot surveys
Fitzgerald River National Park,
Stirling Range National Park & Waychinicup
Contact Mike Barth on 0429842451 or (08) 90713733, email: mike.barth@dec.wa.gov.au

Noisy Scrub-bird, Western Whipbird and Western Bristlebird surveys,
capture and nest-searching in Albany and the Darling Range
May to November
Contact Sarah or Melissa on (08) 98424500
email: sarah.comer@dec.wa.gov.au or melissa.danks@dec.wa.gov.au

Noisy Scrub-bird film star recaptured on Mt Gardner

One of the most exiting events in 2005 occurred in July, when Abby and I spent some time catching birds in the Tick Flat area. Abby was keen to track calling males for her PhD, and see what relationships there might be between calling birds. We set up early on a July morning, just south of the old Jeemuluk hut site. The male scrub-bird was calling quite close to the net line, and seen calling when we walked into the gully. We set up the net quickly, and were pleased to catch him less than 15 minutes after we started. Imagine my surprise, when on removing him from the net I realised that this bird was banded. I immediately thought of the birds we had banded on Mt Gardner and released on the hill since I started (1999), but there were only likely

to be a few or these as most birds caught were translocated. On looking at the band closely I was even more surprised, as it was an old Fisheries & Wildlife Band, not the ABBBS bands that have been in use for many years. On my return to town I immediately looked up the banding records, and was delighted to find this male had been banded in 1997. He was one of the two males caught and filmed on the Totally Wild program which was filmed by channel Ten at Two Peoples Bay. What was even more exiting was the fact that this male was captured defending the same territory he was defending in 1997. Alan Danks recalled this male was removed from his territory in 1997 and taken to the aviaries for

a few days then released back on to the mountain, with a radio transmitter attached. During the couple of days he was in the aviaries another male had moved in and taken up his territory; on release the original male moved rapidly away – apparently having been displaced by the new territorial male.

It would appear that at some time the original male moved back into his territory, and as such was still calling here in 2005. This capture is significant for two reasons. Firstly it is one of the oldest scrub-birds ever recaptured (in 2005 this male would have been at least 10 years old) and he is most certainly the oldest scrub-bird recorded defending a territory.



THE CELEBRATED FIRST PICTURE OF A WESTERN GROUND PARROT IN THE WILD—THIS IS ONE OF A SERIES TAKEN BY BRENT BARRETT DURING NEST SEARCHING IN THE FITZGERALD RIVER NATIONAL PARK IN 2005.

SEE PAGE 1 & 9 FOR BRENT'S RECOLLECTIONS OF BOTH HIS TIME AS PROJECT LEADER FOR THE SCRIPT FUNDED WESTERN GROUND PARROT RECOVERY PROGRAM, AND THE DAY OF THIS EXCITING EVENT

Western Ground Parrot Project Welcomes New Project Coordinator



MIKE BARTH WITH WIFE BRONWYN AND SON JOEL AT A WELL KNOWN LOCATION WEST OF ALBANY

As the newly appointed project officer for the Department of Environment & Conservation's Western Ground Parrot (WGP) Recovery Program, I'd like to introduce myself. My name is Mike Barth and I'm new to Albany and Western Australia. In fact, I'm fairly new to Australia, having lived here for only two years on the east coast of New South Wales and briefly in Canberra.

Originally from southern California, USA, (which has a population nearly that of all of Australia) I have seen many wild places and things disappear under the bulldozer for new housing tracts and shopping centres. At an early age I developed a passion for wanting to save those special "wild" things and places which were so quickly disappearing. This led to my schooling in Ecology and Wildlife Biology and a career working in the wildlife field.

My passion is birds and most of my career has been working with avian life of some sort. I have released peregrine falcons into the remote corners of Oregon, USA; aided in various passerine banding projects in California and the Caribbean; surveyed for

northern goshawks, marbled murrelets and various owls in coastal Alaska; and have been an avid bird-watcher for about twenty years now. I spent over 7 years working on the California Condor Recovery Program with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service from 1995 – 2003 where we reintroduced captive raised juvenile condors into the wilds of California. The project aimed to re-establish a wild population of condors after the species was reduced to just 22 individuals in the early 1980s. To date, there are now over 200 California Condors alive with half of those back in the wild.

Here in Australia, I have worked in the Wildlife Impacts and Protection Section with the Department of Environment and Heritage in Canberra; participated in various bird surveys and banding projects in Canberra and New South Wales; helped monitor threatened birds such as Bush Stone-curlews and Swift Parrots in New South Wales; and managed a small eco-resort owned by Dr. Mary White (author/paleobotanist/conservationist).

The Western Ground Parrot Recov-

ery Program represents a new challenge for me as this critically endangered bird is highly cryptic, seldom seen and difficult to study. The outstanding work of the past two years by Brent Barrett, David Chemello, a number of DEC staff, the Friends of the Western Ground Parrot and countless volunteers has paved the way for future recovery efforts. With the field season now upon us, the focus this year will be to monitor current populations, investigate sighting reports in hopes of finding new populations, continue to bait/trap feral predators in key habitat areas and monitor breeding activity. As in the past, this work can only be accomplished with the help of willing and able volunteers. If you'd like to be involved, please contact me at:

Mike Barth

Office: 9842 4519

Mobile: 042 9842 451

E-mail:

michael.barth@dec.wa.gov.au

**STOP PRESS:
WESTERN GROUND
PARROT CAMPOUT
CHEYNE BEACH
NOV 13TH—17TH 2006**

Come and assist the Friends of the WGP and DEC in determining the status of the WGP in the Cheyne Beach / Waychinicup area

For more information contact:

Anne Bondin

Email: albanyparrot@hotmail.com

or Phone: 9844 1793

Bald Island : 13 Is a Lucky Number ~ Josie Dean

In 1992 Bald Island was chosen as a translocation site for the endangered Noisy Scrub-bird. Between 1992 and 1994 a total of 11 birds, three females and eight males, were introduced to the island. In 2005, 13 years on, Josie Dean joins the annual census trip to monitor the success of the Bald Island translocation.

Bald Island, off Cheyne Beach, currently acts as one of Albany's Gardens of Eden. Threatened species native to the mainland were first introduced to this island in the early 1990s, with the hope of increasing their populations. Eight male and three female noisy scrub-birds (NSBs) made the inaugural crossing during 1992-1994. Now 13 years on, this conservation gamble has proven to be a huge success. On this trip (2005) a total of 65 territorial males were recorded.

Bald Island offers visitors the most well endowed 'bald' spot you may ever encounter. Firstly it has areas of well established trees, under which can be found a lovely mossy undergrowth. The island is abundant with inquisitive quokkas, impressive king skinks and screeching, dive-bombing petrels.

Fortunately for envious people at home all NSB census participants are not given any perks on the trip – other than the good fortune of stepping upon this unique island. Tents, camp food, no showers and full days of walking ensure no-one forgets why they're there. To work - for the greater good of species conservation.

My greatest challenge was sleeping arrangements. The field camp is situated on a near-flat site close to the middle of the island. Depending where your tent is pitched, near-flat can mean anything from a 2°-10° in-

cline. Novices like myself invariably locate themselves on a lesser site. You inevitably awake during the nights to find yourself in a confused heap in the lowest corner of the tent, slid gracefully off your sleeping mat, half spilled from the sleeping bag.

Fortunately the island's nocturnal 'ambience' clearly indicates the time of night/morning for anyone who has (like me) forgotten an alarm clock. The evenings herald the arrival of the petrels which wheel and cry throughout the night and have the strangest habit of plummeting awkwardly to the vicinity of their burrows. Most times they land on the ground, occasionally they hit our tents and there have even been reports of petrels colliding with quokkas that happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time!

As a first time visitor I was shocked by the constant noise, and wondered if I'd even be able to fall asleep. As it turns out I needn't have worried, as I needed their assistance. Sometime in the indiscernible darkness near dawn our avian companions do a shift change and hand the limelight to the NSBs.

That is the signal to extract yourself from what remains of your bed, pull on some day clothes and start the day.

In two and a half days the scrub-bird census team recorded 65 territorial males singing. This is an increase not only from the previous year but also an increase for the 12th consecutive season. It represents an eight-fold increase from our original 8 territorial males translocated 13 years ago. This offshore outpost has been a conservation success story.

The significance of the Bald Island NSB population has been magnified after the devastating wildfire at Mount Manypeaks in December 2004 (see story on page 10). Bald Island's 65 birds now represent 19.2%, almost one fifth of the total scrub bird population in the Albany Management Zone.

Consequently I left Bald Island full of hope and madly crossing my fingers that nothing befalls this Garden of Eden which has successfully hosted the valuable growth of a struggling population for 13 lucky years.



Josie and Simon (can you spot them?) have a well-earned lunch break and take in the view across Mermaid Pt to Mt Manypeaks.

...from page 1....

I wasn't giving up, I just believed that I was living in false hope.

In two days I would pack up the camp then finally put all the project's particulars into order and head back to New Zealand to an exceptionally patient partner and an ecosystem of threatened species which needed saving. That was my prevalent feeling until the raspy call resounded across the low sun backed valley.

I quickly mobilised David and Karl, each carrying various bits of technical equipment and baited breaths. Sure enough there was a response to our tape. I started to stalk through the vegetation. Camera glued to my eye, my heart in my mouth. I heard our tape play a buzz call followed by a level four note, and then the bird responded with the same call combinations. Luck would have it that it was just around the bush in front of me. I was poised to click the shutter the second it flew from the undergrowth. Perhaps not poised enough? Sure enough, up it burst into the air and across in front of me there was barely time for the words "oh my God" to form on my lips.

I hastily photographed a random section of a mallee bush then took a second rather artistic photo of an unassociated portion of the sky then the bird was back in the undergrowth and no doubt running 15 m along the ground. Assuming it read the same book about behaviour that I did. Heck, I was supposed to be writing the book on behaviour of flushed Western Ground Parrot. So I knew that would be it. The first and last glimpse as usual. The same typical photo that any optimistic ornithological photographer could hope to take. An image completely devoid of any parrot-like shape whatsoever. So

ended the encounter... or did it?

Soon there was a great strident call from across the mallee. I stalked around the edge and there on a short stick, with its back to me was this iridescent dream. I shot two quick frames and my heart skipped a beat. I couldn't believe my luck. As I followed there were more calls, more replies, more frames as the bird moved with ultimate ease through the undergrowth.

What ensued was an hour of dancing through the park with a critically endangered parrot. The bird would come in close then depart and as if by magic appear from the opposite direction. It moved over and through vegetation so quickly and confidently it was like a cartoon character set against an endlessly looping background. All the time this elusive, cryptic creature acted with apparent indifference to myself and my two fellow researchers. At the slightest mention of threat the bird took to the air and with ease placed fifty metres between us.

I can't say what the most amazing moment was because there were a few. One definite highlight was having this free living wild bird walk within 30 cm of my feet on a determined march towards the playback equipment. Every detail of its plumage revealed to me through its graceful gait. A true gem was finally being able to see it calling after only hearing this aural ghost for two years and surmising how it would hold its beak or what stance it adopted, how it filled its air sacks when it paused for air in a song.

This event and indeed the events of the last two years are carried with pride on the trophy shelf of my heart. I remember all of those who I met along the

way, everyone who helped me and the Western Ground Parrot and the many that I and the Western Ground Parrot helped. Looking back there isn't a moment when I said this isn't worth the sacrifice. There was never a point when I said enough already. I thank all the events of two wonderful years in south western Australia and believe the people, place and community opened themselves to me in a way I could scarcely predict.

If you were to see me now, you would find me teaching conservation skills to a young group of hopefuls for the New Zealand variation of CALM (DOC). It is a job that has taken me to interesting spots and allowed me to do things that I hadn't yet attempted including All Terrain Vehicle use, stoat trapping, chainsaw work, and the like. I hope to take from this contract a new understanding in teaching that I didn't have before.

I've already had some species work, as the photo proves. This is me with the very same bird (Felix) I was holding in my very first SCTBN article. I recently caught him and three of his mates on Anchor Island off the west coast of New Zealand's' Fiordland. I was there to monitor the post-translocation population of a rare mountain wren (Rock Wren). This work took me to the top of every hillock on the island for two weeks. It was grueling terrain but one very memorable island in a string of memorable field bases I have worked in. I wish Mike all the very best with administering one amazing project and know he will have as much fun and success as I could ever hope for.

Note: due to the late publication if you were to see Brent now he would be back in the Fitzgerald River National Park, assisting Mike and the team with the search for a Ground Parrot nest!!

Mt Manypeaks update - Project Phoenix Rises!

Melissa Danks & Sarah Comer

The Manypeaks fire, of summer 2004/2005, had a significant impact on local populations of Noisy Scrub-bird, Western Whipbird (western heath subspecies) and to a lesser extent Western Bristlebird and other threatened fauna and flora species. While devastating in the short-term, the fire created a rare opportunity to study long-term fire response in this habitat, and thus a new monitoring project was created—Project Phoenix..

Project Phoenix has been funded through a special allocation of research funds from CALM, and was established in March 2005. The project's goal in the first year was to establish a long-term monitoring program for the Noisy Scrub-bird recovery, which includes studying invertebrate food resources and vegetation associated with scrub-bird habitat. In the first year the project also aimed to complete base-line post fire surveys of scrub-birds, whipbirds and bristlebirds. The project also involves general fauna and flora monitoring, increasing fox control, cat trapping and improving fire management capabilities in the area. In 2005 Sarah Comer, Neal Henshaw, Josie Dean and Melissa Danks have been working on the project, assisted by other CALM Albany staff and many fantastic

volunteers. It is hoped that this long-term monitoring project will add to our understanding of how ecosystems recover after a fire event, and provide information that can be used to improve management of the reserve and the species and communities it supports.

So, what were the results of our first year of monitoring – how have the threatened birds at Mt Manypeaks fared?

NOISY SCRUB BIRD

The impact of the wildfire on the Noisy Scrub-bird was particularly significant, as Mt Manypeaks supported the largest scrub-bird sub-population. Approximately one third of the scrub-bird habitat in the Albany area was lost as a result of the fire. It is certain that the scrub-bird habitat will become suitable again although at what stage this is likely to occur is unknown. It could be up to 10 years before habitat structure and leaf litter invertebrates are able to support scrub-birds again. Scrub-bird surveys in 2005 recorded only 342 singing males across the Albany Management Zone compared to 771 recorded during the last complete survey in 2001. This 55.6% reduction in the total population is largely due to the loss of birds from within the burnt area at Mt Manypeaks. Our post-fire survey thus confirmed the estimate of a 55% decline that was calculated in early 2005 based on estimated habitat loss (see Newsletter Issue 09).

WESTERN WHIPBIRD

Early in 2005 we were recording quite low numbers of whipbirds and bristlebirds as they were calling infrequently and for a restricted period of the day, but we persisted and continued surveying through to the end of November, by which time they were singing much more frequently. A population index of 195 suggests that the western heath subspecies of whipbird (*Psophodes nigrogularis nigrogularis*) was also significantly impacted by the wildfire, with only 53% of the 2001 population index present in 2005. It is not known at what stage post-fire habitat is suitable for whipbirds, but it may be that the patchiness of the Manypeaks fire has resulted in a mosaic of fire intensity that will benefit whipbirds in the future.

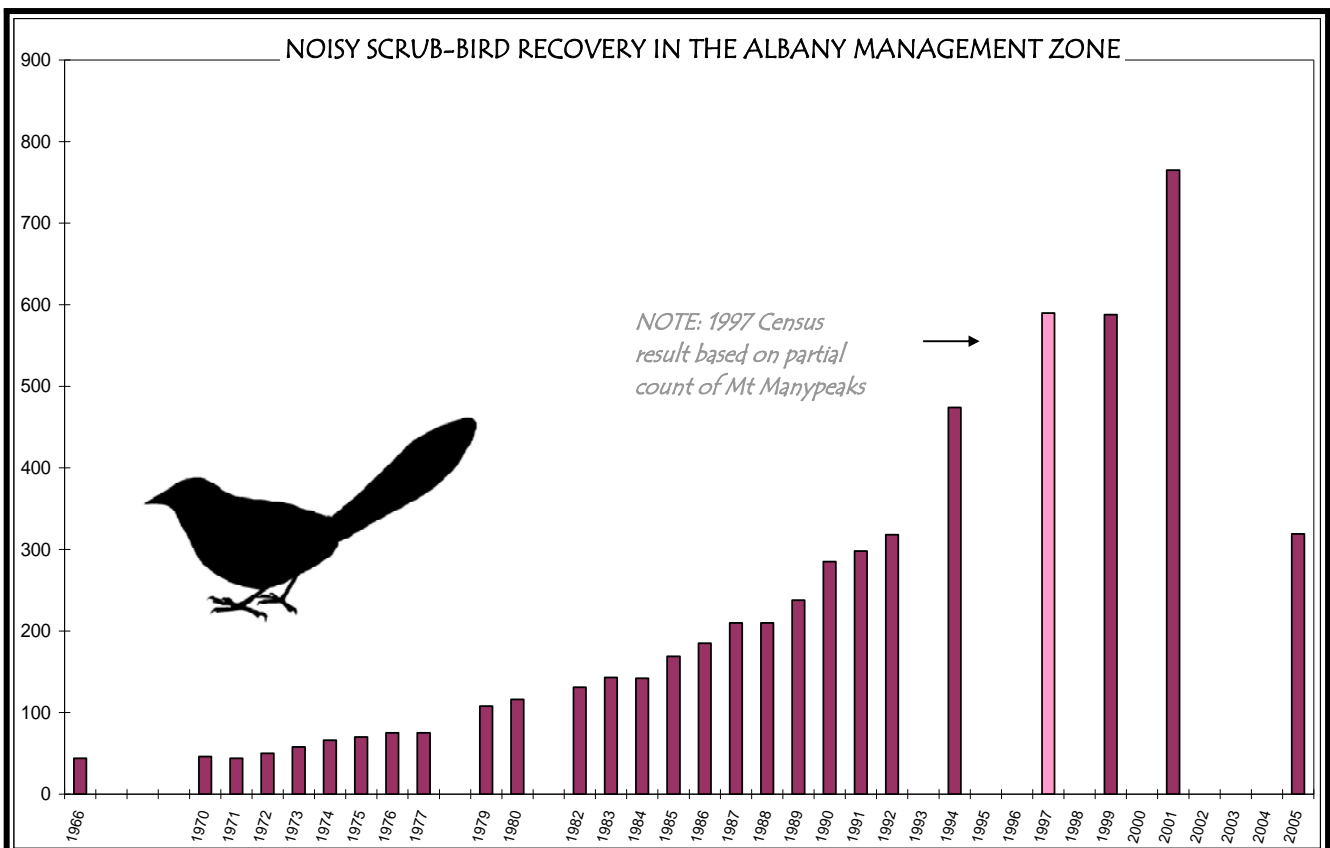
While populations of these two threatened birds have declined and much habitat has been lost as a result of the Manypeaks fire, these species have the ability to recover. The burnt area is rapidly 'greening up' aided by a very wet 2005 winter, and is adjacent to established populations from which birds can re-colonise the area as it becomes suitable. However, it will probably be a long wait. Monitoring will continue into the future – look out for our next update!



Photo—Josie Dean at work on Manypeaks. Josie is a Field Officer working on Project Phoenix, and shared her experience of Bald Island surveys on Page8.



VIEW OF MT MANYPEAKS FROM AN UNBURNT AREA TO THE WEST, JANUARY 2006.



The total population growth curve for Noisy Scrub-birds illustrates the remarkable recovery following the commencement of translocations in 1983, and the subsequent impact of the 2004/05 Manypeaks wildfire. While the 2005 population index (or number of territorial males) is similar to that of 1992, the dramatic loss does clearly demonstrate the success of the translocation program in establishing a number of sub-populations.

LANDSCOPE EXPEDITION TO POISON CREEK

The second Landscape trip to Cape Arid National Park took place in November 2005. With Alan Danks as the trip leader, assisted by Brent Johnson, Allan Rose, Daphne Edinger, Emma Adams and myself, we spent a wonderful week exploring the Mt Arid area from our base camp at Poison Creek with an enthusiastic team of volunteers. Our team left from Albany with volunteers who had come to assist with the diverse range of trapping and flora surveys planned for the week. We also had a job to do in sharing the thrills of surveying Western Ground Parrots in the Park.

In Esperance we collected Mike Barth, who had just driven across the Nullarbor to start his new job—'on the job' so to speak!

After setting up camp and opening traps on a Sunday afternoon focus turned to talking about the activities planned for the week. In November surveying Ground Parrots in the

morning is challenging due to the early rising of the sun. As a result we concentrated on evening surveys which proved to be very successful. The small group of birds on Poison Creek Rd were still doing well, with calling rates very high. It was wonderful that all of our volunteers ac-

morning listening sessions (save an enthusiastic Mike, volunteer Connie Bricknell and myself), so only a few birds were heard as the sun came up to the east. This lack of interest may have been due to the 3am start?!

Daphne Edinger and her team of botanists continued the collection of flora from areas being used by Ground Parrots in the park, which will be extremely useful as the area burnt in 2001 and long unburnt habitat continue to age.

The value of this trip in enabling us to 'check up' on the Ground Parrots in Cape Arid was enormous, and it was a pleasure to spend a week in such a beautiful place with a great group of people.



LANDSCOPE VOLUNTEERS EXPLORING THE GRANITES OF MT ARID IN NOVEMBER 2005

tually heard birds, and that all seemed to enjoy the privilege of standing in such a beautiful place as the sun slips away, while listening to this elusive parrot. Needless to say there were few takers for the

The 2006 Landscape trip will be to Mt Ragged, and if we turn a ground parrot up on this one it will be truly significant!

Sarah Comer

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This newsletter was prepared jointly by the Department of Environment and Conservation and volunteers. We would also like to thank Environment Australia and SCRIPT for their financial support for some of these projects.

In addition we would like to acknowledge the phenomenal support of volunteers on the recovery programs for the south coast threatened birds. In 2005 over 2000 hours of donated volunteer time was spent assisting with surveys for Western Ground Parrots in Cape Arid and the FRNP, and for Noisy Scrub-birds, Western Whipbirds and Western Bristlebirds in the aftermath of the Manypeaks wildfire and in the Darling Range release sites.

Any contributions welcome

If you wish to receive this newsletter electronically please let Sarah know!

NEWSLETTER EDITOR:

Sarah Comer

Department of Environment & Conservation 120 Albany Hwy ALBANY WA 6330

PH: (08) 9842 4500 Email: sarah.comer@dec.wa.gov.au



DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT
& CONSERVATION

