



South Coast Threatened Birds News

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

Western Bristlebird translocation to Walpole

If anyone ever tells you that bristlebirds are easy to catch, don't believe them! The grand plan to capture up to 10 bristlebirds for translocation to Walpole in September and October 2007 came a little unstuck when the bristlebirds refused to cooperate.

Unexpectedly, the bristlebirds weren't very responsive to playback so after several capture attempts in which the bristlebirds pretty much ignored us, we decided to delay captures for another few weeks. Once we launched back into capture attempts we continued to have little success until, just when we were contemplating giving up, we managed to capture Bravo on the

20th October. Bravo was an A-calling bird - the assumption is that A-calling bristlebirds are male and B-calling birds are female. Bristlebirds seem to hang around in pairs and the A-calls that are presumably given by the male are often answered with a B-call. However, no one had told Bravo this and at times in the aviary he repeatedly sang A-calls followed by B-calls!

Bravo's capture was followed by a string of bad luck - just when the bristlebirds were responding well to playback we had four that managed to escape the net. Eventually we managed to catch Delta on 7th November. Delta was a B-calling bird and was captured on the same netline as Bravo. She may have been his mate, although by the time we captured her, Bravo had been replaced by another A-calling bird. On the last day of capture attempts (9th November) we caught Whiskey, another A-calling bird.

So off to Walpole with just three birds - a smaller number than we had planned but a huge amount of effort went into catching them. They were released near Mandalay Beach on the 13th November. All three were fitted with transmitters and for the first week they were radio-tracked intensively. Whiskey was released on his own and Delta and Bravo were released together a few hundred metres away. It was thought that because Delta and Bravo were captured from the



same territory that they might stay together. However, this proved not to be the case. While Delta stayed very close to the release site for the first few days, Bravo took off and went exploring. Whiskey also spent a few days moving around and exploring before returning to within a few hundred metres of his release site.

Five days after release, Delta finally began to move. She could hear Whiskey singing and gradually began to make her way towards him. By the end of the day she was within 100m of Whiskey and began to reply to his A-calls with B-calls. Since they paired up, Delta and Whiskey have continued to stay close together and are often heard duetting. Bravo however has been much less vocal. He sang for the first couple of weeks but then went quiet.

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The last time we picked up a signal from Bravo's transmitter was a month after release - he had settled in an area about 2km away from the release site.

When we visited them on 31st January, Bravo was not heard but Whiskey and Delta were singing away happily together. Hopefully Whiskey and Delta will continue to sing and Bravo will be heard again as well.

This project could not have happened without the support of the Warren Region DEC, in particular, the staff who made the time to come over to Two Peoples Bay to assist with netline preparation and captures (Chery Ehlers, Carol Rodd, Jason Benson, Marnie Swinburn, Carol Ebbet, Jason Fletcher and Mark Barley). The effort that has gone into fox baiting and cat trapping at the release site is also greatly appreciated. Thanks also to volunteers Saul Cowen and Carolin von Prondzinsky and other staff who helped out along the way.

ABBY BERRYMAN

Fitzgerald River National Park Wildfires

In last year's newsletter we had a postscript about the devastating wildfire which burnt through the scrub-bird translocation sites in the Porongurup National Park in February 2007 (see page 6.) January 2008 saw yet more wildfires threatening threatened bird habitat, when a series of lightning storms moved through the Fitzgerald River National Park. The first smoke was reported on the 8th of January, and by the following day some six separate fires had been reported from the west to the east of the Park. While all of these presented challenges for managers, several were of great concern for populations of threatened species in the Park, especially Western Ground Parrots. While at least one fire appeared to self extinguish when it burnt into a low fuel zone, the largest was burning in a north-easterly direction towards Drummond Track and the core WGP breeding habitat that has been the subject of research in the past few years. Various strategies were put into place, including the establishment of an 'Environmental Team' (which amongst others included Dave Chemello, Sarah Comer and Alan Danks) within the fire management team, and upgrading of breaks that could be used to

contain the fire to the west of the Bell Track phytophthora infestation and Drummond Track WGP population. At the same time another wildfire on Mid Mt Barren was also creating concerns for the Wilderness Ground Parrot population, but this wildfire was contained to the cell it started in. The efforts and success of the fire fighting crews and incident management team in minimising the impact of these wildfires on the key remaining populations of the Western Ground Parrot were a great outcome.



The sign above is an example of the signs erected near sensitive areas during the wildfires—these were essential to ensure habitat disturbance was minimised and crews were aware of important areas for protection.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This newsletter was prepared jointly by the Department of Environment and Conservation and volunteers. We would also like to thank DEC, Environment Australia and South Coast Natural Resource Management Inc. for their financial support for some of these projects. BHP Billiton have kindly provided funds to support work on the genetics of the two WA subspecies of Western Whipbird.

In addition we would like to acknowledge the phenomenal support of volunteers on the recovery programs for the south coast threatened birds. In 2007 over 1500 hours of volunteer time was spent assisting with surveys for Western Ground Parrots, surveying and translocating Noisy Scrub-birds, and surveying Western Whipbirds and Western Bristlebirds in the aftermath of the Manypeaks wildfire.

***Any contributions about threatened birds on the south coast are welcome.
If you wish to receive this newsletter electronically please let us know!***

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