



2014 Annual Cocky Count Results

Every year BirdLife Australia and the Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo Recovery Team coordinate a range wide count for the endangered South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo across south-western Victoria and south-eastern South Australia.

This involves coordinating volunteer search groups to conduct searches for Red-tails across more than sixty annual sites in stringybark habitat from Keith to Mount Gambier in South Australia and Little Desert National Park to Nelson in Victoria. Many landholders who have remnant stringybark on their property also participate by searching their own land on the day.

Information gained from the annual count is used to determine the location of large flocks, patterns of habitat use and the minimum population size. It also raises awareness of the needs of the cockatoo and offers volunteers a chance to become involved in recovery activities.



This year the annual count was held on the 3 May 2014 in less than ideal conditions. Heavy rain and high winds on both the Friday and Saturday made locating birds difficult. Many of the tracks were impassable due to boggy conditions, while the gusty winds proved to be problematic for our counters when trying to listen for Red-tails.

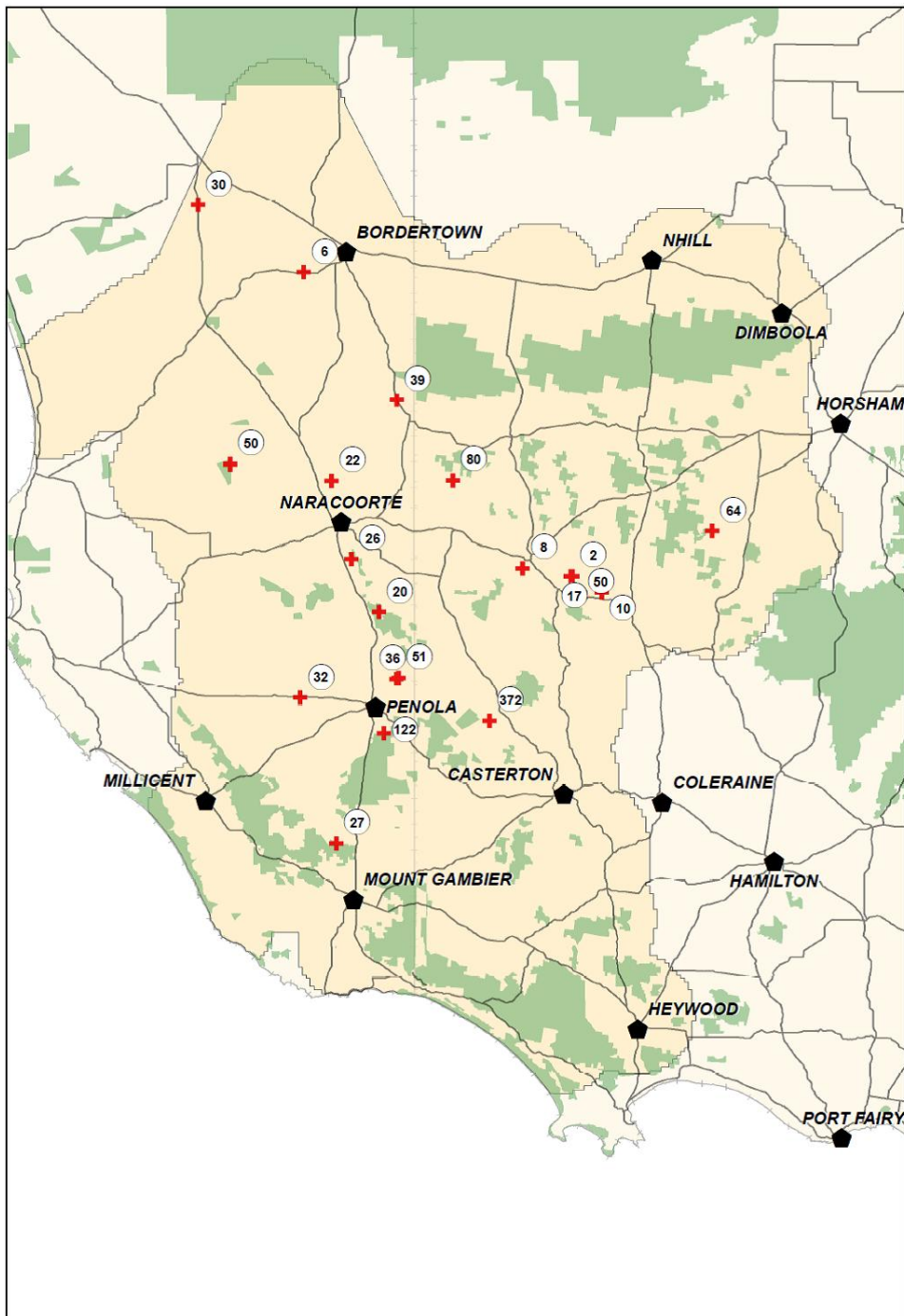
While the weather conditions and inaccessibility of tracks resulted in a poor count by sunset that day, extensive follow up work by several counters resulted in an additional 462 birds included in the final tally. The additional birds have brought the final number of Red-tails recorded to 1064, which is slightly down on last year's tally of 1118 birds and 404 birds down on our record count in 2012.

Image taken by Bob McPherson



Red-tails are highly nomadic, ranging from Natimuk to Nelson in south-western Victoria and from Mount Gambier to Keith in the South East of South Australia, so finding them over an 18,000km² area can be challenging. It's more likely that birds were simply missed on the day, rather than the population suffering a significant rapid decline over the last two years.

A map of the count results is provided below.





This year the birds were dispersed widely across the range, with counters finding Red-tails near Dergholm, Nangwarry, Comaum, Clear Lake, Edenhope, Lucindale, Frances, Wandilo, Keith and Naracoorte. The biggest flocks encountered this year were 372 birds near Boilaar Swamp in Roseneath State Forest and 122 birds in Nangwarry Native Forest Reserve.

This year 131 volunteers participated in the count, ranging from locals, including farmers who chose to search their own land, and metropolitan participants who travelled from as far as Adelaide and Melbourne to help out on the day.

Around 15 of our volunteers braved the wintery conditions and converged on Baileys Rocks for the annual BBQ and campout. As usual volunteers compared stories and tales of their days' adventures, with cockatoos proving to be difficult to find this year by our campers.

BirdLife Australia and the Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo Recovery Team would like to thank all volunteers involved on the day.

For more information on past count results please go to our website www.redtail.com.au.

Bronwyn Perryman

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