

Banding Snippet

A Story of Survival

Windsor Downs Nature Reserve, approximately 5 km from the township of Windsor NSW, is a relatively small area of just 363 ha. It was gazetted in 1990 and contains three endangered plant communities: Shale/Gravel Transition Forest, Castlereagh Ironbark Forest and Castlereagh Scribbly Gum Woodland. The major tree species present are: *Eucalyptus fibrosa*, *E. moluccana*, *E. sclerophylla* and *Angophora bakeri*. Previously it was used as a wartime airfield associated with Richmond RAAF Airbase to hide aircraft from any invading forces. The vestiges, in the shape of the rectangular strip near its eastern boundary, can be seen on the satellite image. Later on it was a holding area for cattle awaiting transport to Riverstone Meatworks.

In September 2013 a wildfire swept through the Reserve, basically from north-west to south-east, cutting short a planned 3-year banding study that commenced in November 2010. The fire ravaged the whole reserve leaving virtually no ground cover and with larger trees blackened and denuded.

This reserve is surrounded by large residential blocks to the south-east and south, a housing development to the north and cleared paddocks and some native woodland to the west. As the fire wall approached from the north-west the surviving birds would have been pushed up to 600 m south-east from the centre of the banding site into the residential neighbourhood's planted gardens.

We returned in July 2016 to resume banding when regrowth was sufficient to camouflage our nets. We are now seven months into our return study and have been pleasantly surprised by the

number of individual birds and the variety of species that escaped the conflagration, returned to the site and were retrapped.

They include:

- 1 Variegated Fairy-wren,
- 7 Superb Fairy-wrens,
- 1 Grey Fantail,
- 1 Speckled Warbler,
- 5 Fuscous Honeyeaters,
- 1 Yellow-faced Honeyeater,
- 4 Eastern Yellow Robins,
- 1 Rufous Whistler, and,
- 1 Yellow Thornbill.

This story of survival is exemplified by one of our resident Eastern Yellow Robins that was banded in December 2010 – just after we started the original study. It was retrapped nine times before the fire event and was one of the first birds caught on our return in July 2016. It has subsequently been retrapped twice more.

Whether the avian fauna will return to its pre-fire composition remains to be seen and is now a primary focus of our study.

A similar scenario has occurred this year with another of our sites at Wianamatta Nature Reserve but this time the area was only partially burnt. We will continue banding and collecting sighting records here to monitor the birds' utilization of both the burnt areas and those areas that remained intact.

John Farrell and Jeff Hardy

On behalf of the Cumberland Plain Avian Research Group

