

THE EFFECT OF WILDFIRE ON BUSH BIRD POPULATIONS IN SIX VICTORIAN COASTAL HABITATS

PAULINE REILLY

19 Lialeeta Avenue, Fairhaven, Vic 3221

Received 18 January 1990

In an area severely burned by wildfire on 16 February 1983, a study was carried out at six different sites at six-monthly intervals from autumn 1984 (14 months post-fire) to spring 1987 (56 months post-fire) to record the time taken for birds to re-establish populations. At 26 months post-fire, 84 per cent of the eventual total of 69 species had been recorded. No specific bird lists were available for the six sites, nor were there unburnt areas to act as controls. Comparison of population re-establishment is made between three sites: two in this present study that most resembled a third in a more intensive study carried out in the same district. The danger of fire is most acute for ground-dwelling species restricted in habitat and distribution, such as Rufous Bristlebirds and Southern Emu-wrens. Their numbers declined and their populations were slow to become re-established.