NEWSLETTER 152

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Contents

Image by Darryl MacKay

Editorial

Committee is close to a decision on next year's conference, and will likely decide to extend our on line activities by streaming the event live to members. We have to balance the cost, our technical expertise and resources, and our desire to be as accessible to members wherever they live across Australia.

It's time to get moving on your applications for help from the Fund For Avian Research, with applications due on or before 31 December 2023 - see below.

We thank Jim Spiker for his report on the Scott Creek Conservation Park Banding Project in South Australia, which is show-cased in this issue. After Bill Rutherford's WA contribution and this, we encourage those in Tasmania, Queensland, Victoria and Northern Territory to consider sending us a story of what they are doing.

Stein Boddington
Editor

Fund for Avian Research - Call for Submissions

The deadline for applications for funding support from ABSA's Fund for Avian Research (FAR) Grants is fast approaching.

The FAR Grants are intended to support researchers with project-related expenses such as buying equipment and/or travel within Australia. It is anticipated that approximately $3,000 will be available in the 2024 round of funding. That amount is usually distributed across several applications.

The amount of money isn't large, but the applications don't need to be lengthy, either! If you are running a research project on some aspect of the Australian bird fauna and could use some extra funding, give it a go.

Please read the Assessment Criteria below carefully. Applicants should email their signed applications (as attachments either in .pdf or .doc formats) to:

info@absa.asn.au
by 31st December 2023

FAR Grants – Assessment criteria

1. General Criteria
How well does the proposal relate to ABSA's objective "to support, encourage and promote the study of Australian birds and to contribute to their conservation" and the purpose of the avian research fund to "assist with the publication of information, the provision of education or the carrying on of research into various aspects of the avifauna of Australia"?

2. Scientific and Technical Criteria
a) Does the proposal have a clearly stated objective?
b) Does the proposal include a clearly stated and practical methodology to achieve its objective?
c) Is the methodology consistent with good scientific design and with good practice (including ethical considerations)?
d) Is the achievement of the objective able to be measured or quantitatively assessed?
e) If successful, how significant and/or useful will the outcome be in terms of our knowledge of the Australian avifauna and its conservation?
f) How likely is the project to result in formal publication of results?

3. Financial Criteria
a) Does the proposal provide a clear and itemised account of how the funds will be spent?
b) Are the allocations in the proposed budget appropriate and do they provide reasonable value for money?
Flightlines Number 36 emailed to all bird banders by the ABBBS in September 2021 to advise that the Australian Faunal Directory had been updated for all fairy-wren species and subspecies in recognition of recent taxonomic changes. Consequently, the species codes for some species and all subspecies had been adopted for all future records submitted to the ABBBS.

Swift Parrots Need our Voice

A plea from Birdlife Australia for help in pursuading Sustainable Timber Tasmanaia to not log critical Swift Parrot habitat.

If Sustainable Timber Tasmania's recently released 3-Year Wood Production Plan goes ahead, native forests vital to critically endangered Swift Parrots could be destroyed. Give Swift Parrots a voice by contacting Sustainable Timber Tasmanaia using our quick and easy tool.

Recent studies suggest the effective population of wild Swift Parrots is 750 individual birds, but could be as few as 300. Protecting the habitat that these remarkable parrots need both on the mainland and in Tasmania is critical in avoiding a very preventable extinction. Simply put, the Tasmanian Government-run Sustainable Timber Tasmania must not allow any logging coupes within important Swift Parrot habitat. Thankfully, helping Swifties is just as simple with our handy tool! Click here to give Swift Parrots a voice, by urging Sustainable Timber Tasmania not to clear important Swift Parrot habitat.

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Friends of Scott Creek Conservation Park (SA)

BANDING PROJECT – ABBBS 269401

Introduction
At the end of January 2021, over 70% of Scott Creek Conservation Park (520 ha of 720 ha), was burnt in a deliberately lit fire. The fire devastated all of the park east of

As is typical of Australian bush, the eucalypts sprouted from epicormic growth within weeks. However more that 50% of this growth was not sustained and simply
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Dorset Vale Road. It was not a severe fire danger day and the fire burnt slowly into a light wind. Consequently, it was a 'hot' burn, reducing much of the scrubby undergrowth to powdery dust and killing many old-growth stringy-bark trees. The landscape became stark with blackened trunks punctuating the many ridges and valleys.

fell off. After a wet season late 2022 and into 2023 there is lush growth of Golden Wattle throughout what is referred to as the 'burn scar'.

Briefly, Scott Creek Conservation Park (SCCP) was established in 1985 with the Friends group forming in 1990. It is situated in the southern Mount Lofty Ranges of the Adelaide (SA) Hills. 135 bird species have been observed in SCCP, including the Chestnut-rumped Heathwren and South Australian Bassian Thrush. The park is 'home' to six honeyeater species all of which abandoned the burnt areas for most of the following two years.

The Friends of Scott Creek have a long-running bird-banding project with records dating back to 1993. Over that time, we have recorded in excess of 12,000 captures with 44 species banded. The banding project revolves around 12 regular sites, with programmed sessions over two mornings twice a month – weather and other conditions allowing. The burnt areas of the park were closed for about 4 months, but we were encouraged to maintain as much of our regularly scheduled banding activities as we could. In particular, we added nearby 'fringe' and 'unburnt' sites to our schedule to try and ascertain if birds had escaped from the fire into these sites. The tables below indicate two years before the fire and two years after, with statistics also added for the next five months into 2023.

The banding project has demonstrated that many species are endemic to SCCP. Recaptures run at about 18% and we have processed several individual birds up to 8 times. Among these are White-browed Scrubwrens at age 14+, Striated Thornbills at age 13+ and a Golden Whistler at age 16+. Smaller birds like the Superb Fairy-wren are often caught within 200 metres of their first capture after eight to ten years.

Species #	Common Name	Feb 2019-Jan 2020				Feb 2020-Jan 2021				Feb 2021-Jan 2022			
		Cap/recap[1]	Burnt	Unburnt	Fringe	Cap/recap	Burnt	Unburnt	Fringe	Cap/recap	Burnt	Unburnt	Fringe
470	Striated Thornbill	55/15	44	6	5	28/10	21	1	6	56/15	20	19	17
475	Brown Thornbill	14/5	11	3	0	7/1	5	1	1	17/0	3	11	3
484	Buff-rumped Thornbill	13/2	13	0	0	2/1	2	0	0	8/0	3	5	0
488	White-browed Scrubwren	34/14	25	0	9	26/6	19	6	1	27/4	3	3	21
529	Superb Fairy-wren	72/24	56	10	6	61/21	51	8	2	89/27	37	27	25
574	Silvereye	33/2	23	9	1	21/1	13	4	4	27/0	9	10	8
591	Eastern Spinebill	22/3	16	4	2	13/3	9	3	1	20/1	4	12	4
614	Yellow-faced Honeyeater	17/3	11	3	3	8/0	7	1	0	27/0	8	12	7
630	Crescent Honeyeater	40/5	31	1	8	30/5	22	5	3	25/2	0	24	1
631	New Holland Honeyeater	67/4	53	0	14	79/4	57	13	9	53/4	7	7	39
662	Red-browed Finch	26/1	8	16	2	29/5	19	1	9	42/0	1	35	6
8311	White-naped Honeyeater	2/0	2	0	0	9/2	8	1	0	5/0	2	0	3
	TOTALS	395/78	293	52	50	313/59	233	44	36	396/53	97	165	134

1. The first number is the total capture including recaptures, the number after the '/' is the recapture number.

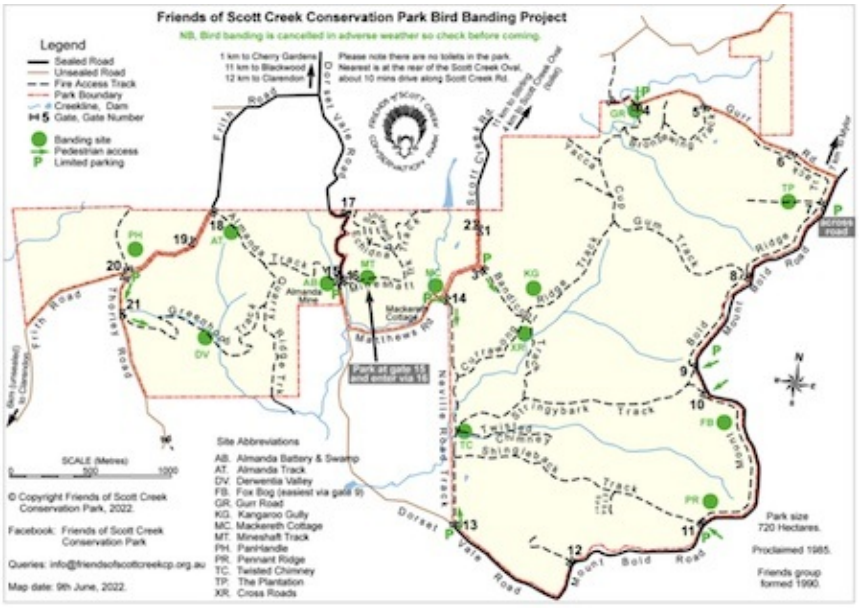
Species #	Common Name	Feb 2022-Jan 2023				Feb 2023-Jun 2023			
		Cap/recap	Burnt	Unburn	Fringe	Cap/recap	Burnt	Unburnt	Fringe
470	Striated Thornbill	54/17	31/8	11/4	12/5	23/5	19/3	4/2	0/0
475	Brown Thornbill	22/4	5/1	15/3	2/0	9/0	8/0	1/0	0/0
484	Buff-rumped Thornbill	9/1	4/0	2/0	3/1	4/0	3/0	0/0	1/0
488	White-browed Scrubwren	6/1	2/0	1/0	3/1	10/1	8/0	2/1	0/0
529	Superb Fairy-wren	44/11	36/10	5/1	3/0	40/9	22/6	9/0	9/3
574	Silvereye	20/1	16/0	1/0	3/1	24/1	7/0	17/1	0/0
591	Eastern Spinebill	3/1	0/0	3/1	0/0	2/1	0/0	0/0	2/1
614	Yellow-faced Honeyeater	5/0	4/0	1/0	0/0	5/0	4/0	0/0	1/0
630	Crescent Honeyeater	2/1	1/0	1/1	0/0	7/1	7/1	0/0	0/0
631	New Holland Honeyeater	3/1	0/0	0/0	3/1	31/1	27/1	3/0	1/0
662	Red-browed Finch	19/0	8/0	6/0	5/0	4/0	3/0	0/0	1/0
8311	White-naped Honeyeater	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0
	TOTALS	187/38	107/19	46/10	34/9	159/19	108/11	36/4	15/4

Analysis

The statistics in the tables above represent captures of the 12 most commonly caught bird species. The periods are from the beginning of February to the end of January in each year to provide a better look at the actual twelve-month periods before and after the major fire

at the end of January 2021 – except for the current year which is included for the five months Feb to June for comparison.

Regular banding sites have been ‘categorised’ as:
Burnt –
FB Fox Bog,
KG Kangaroo Gully,
MC Mackereth Cottage,
PR Pennant Ridge,
TC Twisted Chimney,
XR Crossroads.
Unburnt –
AB Almanda Battery,
AT Almanda Track,
DV Derwentia Valley,
PH The Panhandle.
Fringe –
GR Gurr Road,
MT Mineshaft Track.



Species Notes

1. *Striated Thornbill:* Total captures of the STB remained about the same (2020/21 was low and we don’t know why) although there was a clear move away from the burnt sites in 2021/22. There was some indication of return to the burnt sites in 2022/23 which looks like a strong trend continuing into 2023. Recaptures have remained above 26%, but only one bird of significant age has been recaptured in a burnt site (MC) since the fire (9+). We suggest that it escaped to somewhere near AB and has returned ‘home’ to MC as this is where it was originally banded.
2. *Brown Thornbill:* Some of the literature posits that BTB will do fairly well in areas where long unburnt bush is adjacent to their former habitat that was recently burnt. There is some indication of this in the increasing presence of BTBs in SCCP. SCCP has long been a favoured spot for this bird which has been listed as ‘uncommon’ in the Mount Lofty Ranges (MLR) over recent years – it has been easily seen in SCCP. Like the STB it moved to the unburnt site initially and is now gradually returning to the burnt sites.
3. Buff-rumped Thornbill: Pre-fire the BRTB was mostly found in the burnt sites, moved to the unburnt sites after the fire, but is gradually returning to its’ former habitat as it is regenerating.
4. White-browed Scrubwren: The WBSW showed a distinct move from burnt to fringe sites (25 in 2019, 21 in 2021). These are very sedentary birds and several individuals have been recaptured in the original site more than five times over 12 to 15 years. After banding they are always returned to the exact place of their capture. It is not surprising that they moved to escape the fire in the fringe sites and are still slow at recovering their numbers in the burnt sites. Their familiar bracken cover is regrowing but the colonies of WBSWs have not recovered. We suspect that many perished in the fire. No long-lived WBSWs have been recaptured since the fire. (Stop press: In July 2023, an 11+ WBSW was recaptured for the 8th time in a ‘fringe burn’ site.)
5. Superb Fairy-wren: This is one of the two most frequently captured birds in SCCP. They prefer to remain in small groups of 5 to 10 birds and are rarely recaptured more than 200 metres from the original place of banding. We have processed many SFWs over ten years old. There was a definite move to unburnt and burnt sites immediately after the fire, with an increase in capture in 2021 – perhaps they were competing for ‘home’ territory and more prone to moving around in their new habitat and were more likely to fall into the nets. Numbers were down in 2022 from the immediate post-fire year (89 – 44), but they seem to be coming back across all

sites in 2023. There has been no capture of a SFW older than 5+ since the fire.

6. Silvereye: SE movements have been somewhat unpredictable in SCCP. They move through the bush in flocks of more than 25 birds – perhaps even more than that at The Panhandle (TP). Like all species, they moved to unburnt sites after the fire with an unexplained burst in a burnt site in 2022 before the latest trend to TP in 2023. Overall, their captures are down about 30% since the fire.
7. Eastern Spinebill: The presence of ESBs has plummeted since the fire (22 in 2019, and 3 in 2022 -down 84%). This is almost certainly because of depletion of nectar sources. Eucalypts did not flower for 18 months after the fire. There is no pattern of return and they have not been regularly observed in any sites.
8. Yellow-faced Honeyeater: The 'chasey-games' are starting to come back, but YFHEs are nowhere near the numbers pre-fire. The YFHEs in the MLR do not migrate like they do on the East coast – they are permanent residents in SCCP. The lack of nectar sources and lerps has led to honeyeaters in general abandoning the burnt sites until a slow return in 2023. There was a definite movement to the unburnt and fringe sites in 2021, but the scarcity of food meant that honeyeaters moved beyond SCCP (we think – but don't have any evidence). YFHE captures are down 70% from pre-fire.
9. Crescent Honeyeater: This musical vocalist of the bush totally abandoned the burnt sites following the fire. It moved distinctly to unburnt sites and is only just recently (2023) beginning to return to burnt sites. Honeyeaters need flowers and foliage and CHEs spend most of their time singing and feeding in tall tree canopies. Captures were down from 40 (2019) to 2 (2022) – 95%.
10. New Holland Honeyeater: This is the other of our two most captured birds over the years of our banding in SCCP. This strong gregarious bird sticks mostly to a familiar area and we have recaptured many near their original banding place. Like other honeyeaters they left (or were destroyed) after the fire for safer places – first to nearby fringe burn areas (AB adjacent to MT, & GR) and then were almost unseen in 2022 before making a comeback to burnt sites in 2023, particularly their previous prolific site at TC.
11. Red-browed Finch: As could be expected of these ground-feeders, RBFs headed for unburnt sites immediately after the fire. Like Silvereyes, they have colonised The Panhandle (TP) in flocks of more than 20 birds – we captured 28 all at once in one net at PH. Their return is somewhat even throughout the park although wet weather may have disrupted their movements in recent months.
12. White-naped Honeyeater: This bird is more often heard than captured as it prefers high canopy lerp-ridden foliage and is less often at mist-net level. The lack of substantial canopy growth has led to less of this honeyeater's presence in the last 18 months.

Brown Thornbill

Recaptures

One aim of the banding exercise relates to information we draw from recaptured birds. SCCP is a well-established habitat for many bird species. We know this because of the number of birds that are recaptured, and some are reprocessed up to six or more times. Since the January 2021 fire there has been a marked drop-off in older birds making their way into the nets. As mentioned above, a 9+ Striated Thornbill was recaptured at MC. The next oldest bird since the fire was a White-throated Treecreeper at 7+, also at MC, and a New Holland Honeyeater at 6+ which must have returned from elsewhere (who knows where!) to FB. The question is valid – did the vast majority of older birds perish in the fire? Hopefully they escaped to more attractive habitat and have stayed there.

Capture variations

There are few surprises in the statistics year by year. 2019, 2020 and 2021 were not very much different except for a dip in 2020. The big difference came in 2022 when we captured less than half the number of birds than in the year immediately after the fire. In 2021 there was a clear movement of birds to the unburnt (U),and fringe (F) sites. In 2022 the captures in the burnt sites remained about the same (107 to 97) whereas the combined unburnt sites had a large reduction (165 U 134 F in 2021, and 46 U 34 F in 2022). We can only speculate on what happened. Were these sites 'over-populated' and newcomers forced out? Did they see even better opportunities further away? Was there not enough food to sustain the increase in bird population?

We know from our recent banding that the burnt sites have seen a return to breeding as shown by the number of first-season birds processed. Also significant is the overall increase in only five months of 2023 – there are almost as many captures as for the whole of 2022. However, there was a greater proportion of recaptures in 2022, 38 of 187 [20%] than in 2023, 19 of 159 [12%]. Could this be indicating that the older birds have died or moved away? Can we blame it on the weather and Climate Change? We will welcome ways to answer some of these questions.

Measurements
At this stage we have not had time to look in detail for any trends of change in morphometrics. The are some literature reports of change in overall size in birds of the MLR, but this is over a longer time-scale – e.g. a 1mm decrease in wing length in New Holland Honeyeaters over more than 20 years (based on our statistics independently analysed). It would be valid to examine how weight has varied before and after the fire as this could indicate a scarcity of food or more effort required to find food. One outcome of the fire was support from the Stirling Market which allowed us to purchase more reliable measuring equipment.

What next?
We will maintain the banding schedule alongside trying to keep a log of the regeneration of the habitat. Since the fire, we have come across several species in our banding that are first-timers: Eastern Shrike-tit, Rainbow Lorikeet, Musk Lorikeet, Crimson Rosella (subadelaidae), Painted Button-quail, Rufous Whistler and Dusky Woodswallow. There is a clear increase in the population of Rainbow Lorikeets. We will be watching to see if there is a corresponding diminishing of honeyeaters. Our aim is to maintain the integrity of our data and to do further analysis.

Jim Spiker
Bird Banding Coordinator, SCCP
June 2023

Regent Honeyeater Update

From: *REGENT HONEYEATERS RELEASE PROGRAM - Community Update No 8#*
Download the update from here.
Two flocks, totalling 16 birds were observed for over a month in woodlands surrounding Lake Macquarie, near Newcastle, NSW, in the Lake Macquarie Key Biodiversity Area this winter - the biggest concentration here since 2011! Over their month-long stay, many interesting Regent behaviours were observed including sallying for insects and lots of vocalisation.

Many of the Regents were heard to vocalise their 'near-typical' call throughout their stay but a couple of birds were heard singing like other species such as Wattlebird and Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters. The 'loss of song' and their uptake of other species song is an interesting but worrying situation and possible actions are currently being investigated by the Australian National University (ANU) and Taronga Zoo.

One zoo-bred bird from the 2022 release cohort was seen in the company of two wild birds, which is heartening news.
Please report any Regent Honeyeater sightings ASAP by either:
• Reporting online here https://birdlife.org.au/what-to-do-if-you-see-a-regent-honeyeater
• Emailing woodlandbirds@birdlife.org.au
• Calling Mick Roderick (Regent Honeyeater Recovery Coordinator) on 1800 621056

Cuckoos Don't Always Win

Egg 'signatures' will allow drongos to identify cuckoo 'forgeries' almost every time, study finds. African Cuckoos may have met their match with the Fork-tailed Drongo, which scientists predict can detect and reject cuckoo eggs from their nest on almost every occasion, despite them on average looking almost identical to drongo eggs.

Full story on "Science Daily" website