



MEDIA RELEASE

29 January 2021

COOL BURNS FOR COCKY CUISINE

Can cool burns resolve the cockatoo's food crisis? It seems they might, with the added benefit of flammable fuel load reduction.

Some months ago, Glenelg Hopkins CMA and Gunditjmara Traditional Owners burnt areas of the Glenelg Plain in an attempt to find out whether fuel loads could be reduced and native plants regenerated without damaging the food supplies of the endangered South-eastern Red-Tailed Black Cockatoo.

These fussy eaters only like the fruit of Brown and Desert Stringybark trees (*Eucalyptus baxteri* and *E. arenacea*) in the Glenelg Hopkins region. Often, fuel reduction burns are of high intensity which damage these tree canopies, resulting in reduced food available for the Red-tails for up to 10 years.

The Glenelg Hopkins CMA's cultural burning project is examining the use of traditional Aboriginal burning techniques as an alternative to contemporary hazard reduction burning methods.

Traditional burning techniques are of low intensity and avoid that canopy scorch. Over a four-year period, the Glenelg Hopkins CMA will work with Gunditjmara Traditional Owners to monitor vegetation responses to these traditional burning techniques.

Recently, Glenelg Hopkins CMA's Ben Zeeman and Matt King were out in the field conducting a post-burn flora survey to see how the areas had responded to the burns.

Initial observations included flowering Grass Trees and a high number of Banksia seedlings growing following their pod-split from the burn, while the tree canopies have remained as productive food sources for the Red-tails.

When re-surveyed after the burn, Glenelg Hopkins CMA's senior field officer, Ben Zeeman, said they found patches that appeared almost completely untouched by fire.

"On analysing that data it showed the burn pattern was highly species specific – some plant species were almost completely burnt out, while others were largely untouched. This is likely to have occurred due to differences in species flammability," Ben said.

"The cool, low-intensity burn may have reduced bushfire risk at the site by removing the more flammable fuels, while leaving low-flammable fuel behind to continue serving as habitat cover.

"While more work is still needed before we can be really confident, it is a really interesting early result.

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This cultural burning project forms part of the wider Red Tail of the Glenelg Plain Project, which is supported by the Glenelg Hopkins CMA with funding through the Australian Government's National Landcare Program.

To read the results of the post burn vegetation survey, visit www.ghcma.vic.gov.au

The wider program is being delivered in conjunction with Birdlife Australia. Information about the recovery project and the Red-Tail Black Cockatoo can be found at www.redtail.com.au

END

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CAPTIONS:

LEFT: *The cool burn nature of the controlled burn ensured flames did not reach the tree canopies, therefore preserving the Red-Tail Black Cockatoo food source.*

ABOVE: *Glenelg Hopkins CMA's Ben Zeeman surveying the post-burn recovery which has shown a species-specific burn pattern.*

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BELOW: Post burn vegetation recovery has been strong.



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