

Cocky counters count the most cockies yet

The fate of Australia's Endangered south-eastern subspecies of the Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo is monitored each year, and this year's results have yielded the most birds yet. Results of this year's Annual South-eastern Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo Count, held on 5 May, were the highest since BirdLife Australia (BirdLife Partner) began official counts in 1996. A total of 160 volunteers participated, spending over 240 hours scouring more than 2700 kilometres of roadside stringybark forest in search of these elusive birds across south-eastern South Australia and south-western Victoria. A total of 1468 birds were recorded, 64 birds more than the previous best tally (1404 birds in 2008). These results are very encouraging, especially given the low numbers of cockatoos (<850 birds) counted in the three previous Counts. The population appears to have remained relatively stable over the last 4 years, despite poor count results since 2009. This year's result confirms our suspicions that birds were missed in previous Counts, rather than the population suffering a sudden and significant decline. Of the 1468 birds, over 60% were recorded within 30 kilometres of the town of Edenhope in western Victoria. This is likely to be attributable to the heavy seed crop of its food plants, Desert Stringybarks and Bulokes, that grow in the area (RTBCs feed almost exclusively on the seeds of Desert and Brown Stringybarks and Buloke). This year, being a good seeding year, has seen hundreds of RTBCs flocking to the northern parts of their range to exploit this food resource, highlighting the importance of protecting and restoring stringybark and buloke habitat throughout its range. The Annual RTBC Count allows us to analyse flock composition, which provides an indication of last year's breeding success. This year, around 16% of the birds counted were juveniles (less than 4 years old), indicating that last year's breeding season was no better than the previous one. Apart from assisting our research, the count also promotes awareness of the conservation needs of the RTBC, a local flagship species, and provides a great activity, enjoyed by all. We would like to thank everyone involved and acknowledge that this event would not be possible without the help and support of our volunteers. For more information on past annual and flock count results, please visit our website www.redtail.com.au. **Subscribe to The BirdLife Pacific Quarterly E-Newsletter**