swifts
swifts across the strait
2007

Swifts Across the Strait is the newsletter of the Swift Parrot Recovery Program. The Swift Parrot is an endangered bird species endemic to South-East Australia. Swift Parrots (*Lathamus discolor*) breed in Tasmania and migrate to the mainland feeding on wintering flowering gum and lerp in areas of Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia and Queensland. The birds then return to their breeding grounds in the Spring. The full extent of their recorded range, from Tasmania to Queensland may be the longest of all migrating parrots worldwide. The sporadic movement of the parrots means that a large number of people are needed to keep track of its distribution, and to collect information on the bird's habitat requirements.

Swift Parrots in Tasmanian Blue Gum
Photo: Aleks Terauds

Characteristics of Swift Parrot (*Lathamus discolor*) nesting habitat

by Janneke Voogdt

I first walked up to the top of Craigow Hill (Meehan Range) in Tasmania's southeast on a misty and cool November morning. I still had a leftover jetlag and expected summer to be hot in Australia. The vegetation was fascinating, the sounds and smells strange. Chattering Swift Parrots everywhere.

Coming from northern Germany, I can say that seeing parrots in the wild feels amazing. Being able to see rare and threatened parrots nesting is dumbfounding. I came to Tasmania to collect data on the habitat requirements of breeding Swift Parrots for my final thesis in Biology (german Diplomarbeit).

This project would never have happened without the help and encouragement of Matt Webb and Mark Holdsworth (Threatened Species Section, Biodiversity Conservation Branch, Department of Primary Industries and Water in Hobart), Eric Woehler (Chair of Birds Tasmania) and Professor Alastair Richardson (School of Zoology, University of Tasmania) - thank you.

After over-wintering on mainland Australia, Swift Parrots migrate to Tasmania for breeding. Nesting distribution is determined by hollow-bearing trees and the availability of foraging resources. Breeding locations vary annually in response to flowering patterns of Blue Gums. Breeding habitat has been reduced considerably due to land clearance through agriculture, forestry activities and urban development. Habitat loss and fragmentation are seen as the main threat to the Swift Parrot.

Loss of hollows and high value food resources affect Swift Parrots directly, while recruitment of hollow bearing trees is an important consideration for conservation in the future. Most of the population nests in a series of loose aggregations. The size of these nesting aggregations is most likely determined by the availability of potential nest trees and foraging resources. My study investigated nesting preferences of Swift Parrots within known nesting aggregations by examining trees, tree hollows, Blue Gum flowering and topographic and other environmental variables.

The fieldwork was split into nest searches in the core breeding time from November 2005 to mid-January 2006 and detailed investigations of three nesting areas from the end of February to May 2006. I sampled a total of 104 quarter hectare sized plots on Craigow Hill, Roberts Hill (Bruny Island) and in Fern Tree. These were composed of 52 nest plots and 52 non-nest plots. The study revealed that Swift Parrots select eucalypts with multiple hollows, large trunk diameters and in noticeably advanced

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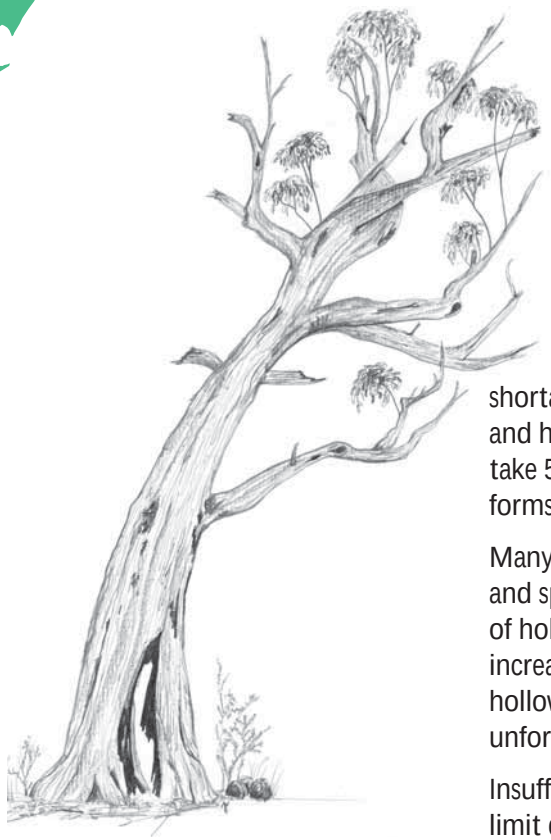
stages of senescence. These trees are most likely to provide suitable nest hollows. I also counted Blue Gum opercula on the ground as a measure of flowering intensity and distribution surrounding each area to gain a broad impression of the flowering patterns surrounding nesting sites. Aggregated nesting was associated with heavy Blue Gum flowering nearby.

The study suggests that where foraging resources are abundant, hollow availability is the main factor influencing the Swift Parrot's selection of a nesting site or tree. Trees with numerous hollows are more likely to provide a suitable hollow for the Swift Parrot than trees with less hollows. It is suggested that hollow supply attracts Swift Parrots and thus influences nest occurrence and distribution. The average number of potential nest hollows suitable for Swift Parrots was 10 per nest tree.

Swift Parrots nest in dead or alive trees and do not prefer a particular tree species for nesting. The frequency of nests in a given tree species at each site was more associated with the availability of this species in the nesting habitat.

Swift Parrots are more likely to nest in areas supporting old-growth trees and abundant hollows. Nest trees investigated had an average DBH (diameter at breast height) of 111cm and were rarely below 60cm DBH. Nest trees were also more likely to be showing signs of stress or senescence (dead limbs and branches).



'Nest Tree' by Janneke Voogdt

Hollow abundance is positively associated with tree diameter, age and signs of senescence or dieback. Hollow-bearing trees used by vertebrate fauna are usually not younger than 120-180 years.

The process of hollow formation is long and complex while clearing of hollow bearing trees destroys hollows very quickly. Dead trees provide far more hollows than live trees but do not remain standing.

Old-growth forest stands are rare in the southeast of Tasmania. Maria Island, Craigow Hill, Roberts Hill and parts of Fern Tree are mapped as old-growth forest. Breeding in a clumped distribution may simply reflect the distribution of hollow-bearing trees across the landscape.

Past and current land use practices are likely to be responsible for a shortage of hollow-bearing trees and hollows in the future. It may take 50-150 years before regrowth forms hollows.

Many land uses do not offer time and space for the natural regeneration of hollows. A lack of hollows may increase competition between hollow dependent species with unforeseeable impacts.

Insufficient foraging habitat can limit densities of breeding birds, while a shortage of nest sites can have the same effect where food is abundant. Poor flowering on a local scale is likely to result in low use of suitable tree hollows by Swift Parrots.

Hollows are unlikely to be a limiting factor for Swift Parrot in large stands of old-growth forest. However, in highly fragmented and disturbed areas a lack of hollows may limit breeding densities when abundant flowering is present. This is particularly relevant in years when there is only a handful of locations where there is heavy flowering.

While loss of Swift Parrot habitat has undoubtably affected Swift Parrot foraging areas, the influence on nest hollow availability may have been underestimated.

I hope the findings of my study will aid identification of Swift Parrot breeding habitat and increase awareness of the need to manage tree hollows.

Swift Parrots overheard overhead

By Alan Morris, 14th March 2006

Hi Birders, Here at Murray Street Bateau Bay, my house is located in a group of streets that are lined with and or also have on the blocks, very large Blackbutts (*Eucalyptus pilularis*) and Coast Bloodwoods (*Corymbia gummifera*) which are currently in flower.

This part of Bateau Bay is on a north facing slope which then rises up into Wyrrabalong National Park, where Blackbutts and Bloodwoods are the dominant trees but on the lower slopes of the hill, Swamp Mahoganys (*Eucalyptus robustus*) are also located. The latter species are some time off flowering.

Consequently we have hundreds of Rainbow and Musk Lorikeets around the house and throughout Bateau Bay at present and the air is full of the sound of calling Lorikeets.

However at 6.20pm yesterday evening (Monday 13/3/06), in the kitchen we heard flying low over the house the unmistaken "clink, clink" call of the Swift Parrot, there appeared to be two birds. I rushed out but could not see them, probably they kept going.

I have often wondered when there are many other lorikeets present, whether I would be able to recognise the call of the Swift Parrots amongst the din of the other lorikeets when they first arrive! But there was no mistaking the Swift Parrot call after all.

It remains to be seen whether this was an isolated visit, or whether these are the first of many birds to stay around for the next few months.

However this is an early date, they usually do not turn up at Bateau Bay until April.

Mugga Ironbark Flower

Photo: Debbie Saunders

Mugga Ironbark

Photo: Debbie Saunders

Exhibition

Helen Fitzgerald has an exhibition: '*Flowers, birds and landscapes*' which features the Swift Parrot amongst other species.

The exhibition opens from 1 April to 15th May 2007 at the Wood Works Gallery, Kings Hwy, Bungendore, NSW. Phone: (02) 6238 1682.

For a preview of the show please visit her website: www.helenfitzgerald.com

Funding Opportunities

The WWF Threatened Species Network Funds opened on April 2nd and will close on June 1st.

Information regarding TSN grants is available on the website: http://wwf.org.au/ourwork/species/tsngrants/ where applications may be downloaded.

The Threatened Species Network Community Grants have been established to support and inspire community groups to work on the conservation and recovery of threatened species and ecological communities. The Grants fund projects that benefit species or ecological communities that are listed as threatened under the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (1999).

Please contact Swift Parrot Mainland Recovery Coordinator, Belinda Cooke for assistance and support in applying for these grants.

Alternatively, please contact the WWF TSN representative in your State.

Swift Parrot Recovery Team – member profiles:

Belinda Cooke

One of the first things I did as the new Swift Parrot Recovery Mainland Coordinator was to meet up with the rest of the recovery team. This meant a trip to Tasmania and a chance to view Swift Parrots in their breeding habitat on Bruny Island. We spotted several birds, getting good views and hearing their call. Needless to say I am very happy to be starting this position.

I have worked in different environments in the past including Samoa, Zimbabwe, Papua New Guinea, Sydney and the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands in South Australia. I have been active in community involvement and education programs, in Zimbabwe I managed the Environmental Education section of a Nature Reserve.

I have also had experience in project management and working on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands. In this role I facilitated traditional land practices and threatened species programs. I think this work history indicates my interest in learning more about the natural world and in working in different environments, the most recent being with DEC in Queanbeyan, NSW.

My involvement in migratory Australian birds goes back to when I was studying Science and became interested in bird banding and bird research. I followed this up with an honours project on the Regent Honeyeater.

I was active as a volunteer in some of the activities organised by the Regent Honeyeater Recovery Team. My early involvement with the Regent Honeyeater meant that I became fascinated with migratory events and recognised the importance of facilitating and supporting volunteer involvement. I am looking forward to hearing from volunteers and getting in touch with people across the region visited by Swift Parrots.

Garry Cheers

Garry Cheers is employed through the Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria and coordinates Swift Parrot recovery work from this State. Garry has been busy monitoring Swift Parrots in several sites across their distribution in Victoria. Volunteers from this State should contact Garry prior to the May survey to have a chat about which sites they intend to survey or to find out about areas that still need to be surveyed.

Garry can be contacted by phone: 03 5461 2970, or email: Garry_Cheers@yahoo.com.au

Datums explained

Mapping and coordinate systems are based on a datum, which is a mathematical surface that best fits the shape of the Earth. Australia's previous datum, the Australian Geodetic Datum (AGD) best fitted the shape of the Earth in the Australian region only. The later AGD84 coordinates are based on the same datum and is very similar.

Since 2000 the Geocentric Datum of Australia (GDA94) has been used. The main reason for this change is the widespread use of Global Positioning Systems (GPS), which are based on a geocentric datum known as the World Geocentric System 1984 (WGS84). For most practical purposes, WGS84 and GDA coordinates are the same.

Most modern Australian maps will be on the GDA94 datum although many Australian topographic maps are still on an old AGD66 datum. The difference between the older AGD66/84 and GDA94/WGS84 in actual distance is approximately 250m. Therefore it is very important that you include the datum on record sheets. For observers who don't use a GPS it is fine to continue marking down coordinates from a map, or providing a mud map or marking the location on a photocopied street map.

Photo: Geoffrey Dab

Draft Management Plan for Chiltern

Parks Victoria has released the Draft Management Plan for the Chiltern Mount Pilot National Park.

Many of you would know Chiltern as a hotspot for Victorian Woodland bird species, including Swift Parrots and Regent Honeyeaters.

Chiltern is also known for threatened orchids (and other flora), rare and threatened reptiles, and amphibians. One of the potentially impacting actions outlined is the proposed introduction of prospecting in the north east section of the park.

To view this plan and make up your own mind about the management outlined visit: http://www.parkweb.vic.gov.au/1ministory.cfm?story=208 or plans may be purchased for $8.80 from: Parks Victoria Information Centre, Level 10, 535 Bourke Street, Melbourne VIC 3000 Phone: 13 19 63.

People are encouraged to make comments on the plan, submissions are requested by Monday 28 May 2007.

These responses can be posted or emailed to: Chief Ranger, Murray Central District, Parks Victoria, PO Box 3100, Bendigo VIC 3550 Phone: (03) 5430 4645, Email: ChilternPilotPlanSubmissions@parks.vic.gov.au.

If you want to find out more information about this issue good contacts are:

Martin O'Brien, Wildlife Biologist - Threatened Species & Communities Section, Department of Sustainability and Environment, 2/8 Nicholson St, East Melbourne 3002, Victoria. Phone: (03) 9637 9869 Email: Martin.O'Brien@dse.vic.gov.au

and the Friends of Chiltern National Park through Neville Bartlett (Secretary), 18 Barton Drive, Baranduda 3691, http://home.iprimus.com.au/focbinp/.

Habitat focus

Tree species profile

(Information from Brooker. M., and Kleinig. D., 1993, Field Guide to Eucalyptus: Volume 1 South-eastern Australia, Inkata Press, Melbourne.)

Photos sourced from: Brooker and Kleinig, 1993

Inland: Grey Box (*Eucalyptus microcarpa*)

Found on the western slopes and plains of NSW, south-eastern Queensland, in central, western and northern Victoria and in the southern Flinders and Mount Lofty Ranges of South Australia. Reaches a height of 25m. Tessellated grey rough bark covers the trunk, branches are smooth, leaves are alternate and a dull green colour. Creamy yellow flowers in February to August.

Coastal: Spotted Gum (*Corymbia maculata*)

Found from southern Queensland, south along the NSW coast and in a section of eastern Victoria.

Bark is smooth, cream coloured bark flaking off in patches to reveal dark grey colours.

Flowers between May and September, flowers are a white-cream colour.

swifts across the strait

Survey Round Up 2006

Yellow Box in drought.

Photo: Debbie Saunders

Introduction:

A total of 586 surveys were conducted, resulting in 582 birds spotted during the May survey and 428 spotted during Autumn. The numbers of volunteers who continued to look out for Swift Parrots during other times of the year were also highly appreciated as their efforts resulted in a further 507 birds recorded. The 2006 Swift Parrot season saw some interesting changes in records and distribution. We would like to thank all the volunteers involved. The largest flocks sighted contained approximately 50 birds from St Arnaud, Victoria.

Victoria

The majority of birds in 2006 were sighted in Victoria, particularly in the Bendigo and St Arnaud regions. One volunteer in particular, Anne Hughes, recorded many Swift Parrots last year. Anne who is based near St Arnaud saw the birds from 27th March 2006 almost every day until July 22nd, and then sighted another 2 more during the August weekend count. During this time the birds were observed roosting in River Red Gum (*E. camaldulensis*) and Grey Box (*E. microcarpa*) and foraging during the day. Anne observed the flock numbers to build up during late May through to June, when flocks of approximately 50 birds were observed; these numbers dropped off in July.

Records from the Maryborough-Dunolly region significantly decreased from 2005 when this region provided the largest numbers in Victoria. There was little coverage of the further Western and Eastern extremes of the Swift Parrots known over-wintering range in Victoria in 2006. Perhaps there are some new volunteers, or 'old' volunteers who may be keen to take a look at some sites in these areas in 2007?

NSW/ACT

The highest numbers of Swift Parrots in this region last year were sighted outside of the survey weekends. The South Coast and North Coast recorded the highest Swift Parrot numbers. Resulting from the observations of four volunteers in Nambucca (George Bedggood) and Stuarts Point (James Tedder) on the North Coast, and Moruya (Mike Crowley) and Merimbula (Chris Slade) on the South Coast.

The overall higher numbers in these two areas were similar to the 2005 results, but much higher than the 2004 results. Also similar were the low numbers recorded on the Central Coast (none in 2006) despite a high amount of effort from knowledgeable birders in this area. Numbers of birds from the South-West Slopes have dropped in the last couple of years, perhaps due to the drier weather; it will be interesting to see what 2007 brings.

QLD / SA

Despite searches from skilled volunteers in SA and QLD, no Swift Parrots were recorded during the whole of 2006. The last records received from QLD were in 2004 in the Brisbane and Warwick areas. The last records for SA were in 2005 from Millicent and Custon areas.

2007 Swift Parrot records,

The first mainland records of the 2007 season were from Victoria in Mornington Peninsula, Newham, Melton, Bend of Islands, Newport Lakes and in Muckleford from Debbie Worland who saw them on her property. Thanks to Laurie O'Connor and Tom Fletcher for sending in record sheets and Steve Davidson and Debbie for contacting me. Recent records from NSW were from Cowan, Merimbula and Coffs Harbour. Thanks to Neil Hayes and Bob Allen for calling in with their sightings.

I encourage other Swift Parrot observers who see these birds outside the survey weekends to still fill in a form and send it on.

Survey info

Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater Record Sheets are available from the internet at: www.birdsaustralia.com.au/birds/downloads/swift_regent_survey.pdf and www.threatenedspecies.environment.nsw.gov.au - follow the links to Swift Parrot (*Lathamus discolor*)

If you wish to send in your completed survey form electronically please send them to this email address: swiftparrots@yahoo.com.au.

In the subject field of the email please write 'Record Sheet', thank you.

Figure 1: Swift Parrot Recovery Program Volunteer Survey Weekend Results 1995-2006

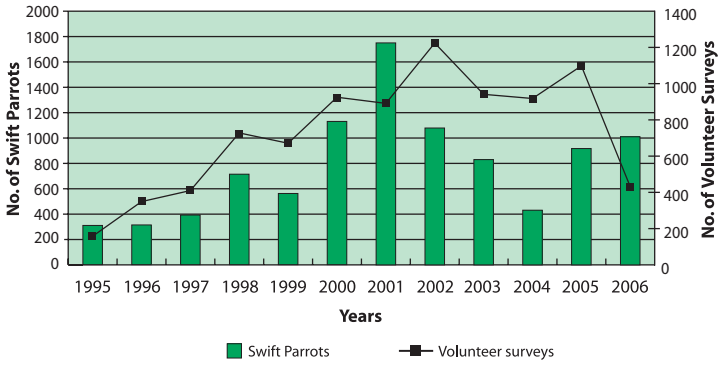


Figure 2: Victorian Regional Swift Parrot Records 2006 Volunteer surveys

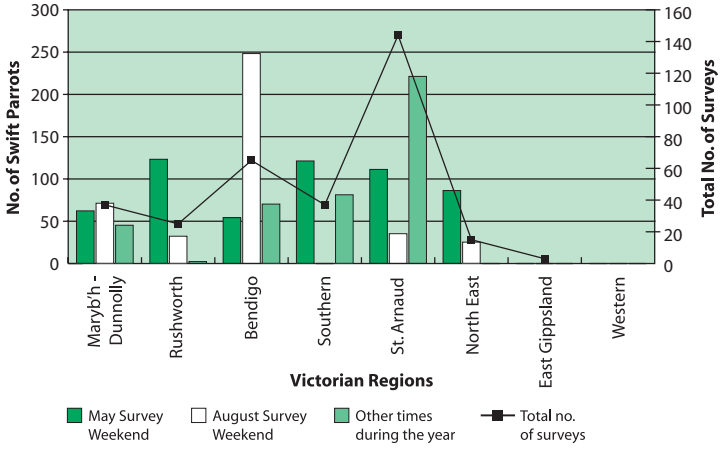
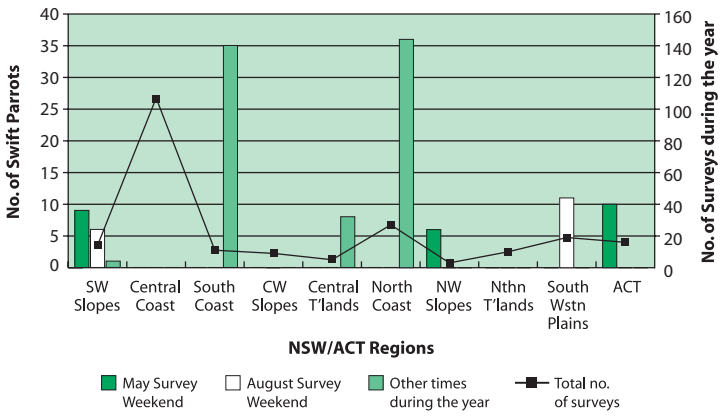


Figure 3: NSW/ACT Regional Swift Parrot Records 2006 Volunteer surveys



A History of Sightings

by George Bedggood 28th July 2006

While exploring the internet my wife obtained a copy of the Swift Parrot/ Regent Honeyeater Record Sheet for me. I have been living at this address for 11½ years and am a member of the Nambucca Valley Bird Watchers, BOCA and have been involved in atlas records in Vic, NSW and nationally. Close to my home I have an area of Gympie Messmate, planted for forestry purposes and it has been thinned twice in the eleven years I've been resident. When it flowers, which seems to be erratic, it attracts the Lorikeets and Honeyeaters in large numbers. I have been monitoring the plantation and as yet have not seen Swift Parrots there yet.

In the winter of 1996 there were claims SP had been seen north of Bellingen in an area known as the 'Promised Land' and also at Hungry Head. Although we promptly visited the sites we did not see any Swift Parrots. My first record for the Mid-north Coast was on 30th April 2003 at the Hastings Valley Motel, Port Macquarie when 10 flew North with a group of Rainbow Lorikeets. On 20th June 2005 five, perhaps six were in the Eucalyptus blossom with Scaly-breasted Lorikeets and a mix of Honeyeaters. Rainfall in 2005 and 2006 has been sparse and erratic and the Eucalyptus and paperbarks have flowered at unusual times and more frequently and more profusely with a large variety of Honeyeaters and also insect eaters especially Grey Fantails and Pardalotes being common.

In 1961-2 I was teaching on the outskirts of Bendigo and J.V Ryan, a past secretary of the Gould League lived nearby. He introduced me to SP along with such local gems as the two species of Heathwrens, Spotted Quail-thrush, Crested Bellbird, Black-eared Cuckoo and the Regent Honeyeater, which was a common bird of Bendigo street trees at that time. As well as bird-watching we shared many hours trout fishing and so I recorded SP at Harcourt, Castlemaine, Dunolly, Bridgewater, Maryborough, Heathcote and Rushworth. Between 1965-76 I saw groups in areas across Victoria: East Gippsland, Strathbogie Ranges Epping, North Melbourne, Woori Yallock and South Gippsland. You might care to comment on the next record: in Jan 1981, I saw four flying North-west at Yarra Creek on King Island.

Editors Note: Swift Parrots have also been recorded from King Island in March 1978 by Max McGarvie and in June 1979 (a late straggler?). Records were of a group of 15-20 birds feeding on E. globulus in 1978 and of a single bird flying overhead in 1979 (Brown 1989). Another record from March 1988 has been noted from nearby Albatross Island of a group of 5-7 flying overhead in a general northerly direction. In 'The Fauna of King Island' edited by Richard Donaghey, the Swift parrot is mentioned as a "passage migrant".

swifts across the strait

Migration

PhD Update

By Debbie Saunders

I find bird migration incredibly fascinating with so many intriguing questions remaining unanswered.

Migrating Swift Parrots.
Photo: Nevil Lazarus

In particular we know very little about migration in Australia despite many of our bird species undertaking large seasonal movements, including the swift parrot. How they know where there are good sources of food remains a mystery, and the paths they take to get there are far from obvious.

Although we know swift parrots will arrive somewhere on the mainland around March and are generally all back in Tasmania by November, specific arrival and departure dates are far from clear.

As many recovery program survey volunteers know, swift parrots will often return to the same sites, and even the same trees in different years, depending on the food available. However, at other times they appear in places no one has ever recorded them before – are they using new areas or were we just not looking in those areas in the past?

Finding answers to such questions is fundamental to our understanding of many migrants. Yet most methods used to answer these questions in various corners of the globe just don't seem to work here in Australia.

Firstly, efforts to band and radio-track migratory land birds in Australia have revealed little on migratory movements, due largely to the variable nature of habitat use which is dependant on highly variable environmental conditions across a broad landscape.

Secondly, given the small size of many land bird migrants, including the swift parrot that weighs approximately 65g, current satellite tracking devices are just too big since they need to weigh no more than 2g.

Thirdly, there appears to be no noticeable mass migration movements making the identification of movement pathways and stop-over sites very difficult. However with the fantastic long-term efforts of volunteers, we are now accumulating large numbers of valuable swift parrot and nil records.

This volunteer data is also helping us to identify key regions and habitats throughout the species' range and provides a focus for conservation efforts. To demonstrate significant shifts within the species' distribution remains a crucial step in demonstrating to the broader community and policy makers the importance of habitat conservation.

Working with national scale volunteer data and distributing this information is a focus of my PhD research.

I am extremely grateful for all the efforts of many people over the years to establish such a valuable dataset.

I certainly miss the regular interactions with recovery program volunteers across the country since finishing up in my coordinator role, however I still feel inspired by the lasting legacy of information we now have thanks to the extensive volunteer efforts which have enabled me to pursue my research on migration.

Photo: Nevil Lazarus

Bird Migration and the Swift Parrot

By Belinda Cooke

Ever wondered how the Swift Parrot, and other migratory Australian birds know where to go each year, or even when to start flying?

Migration is generally a defined movement that occurs twice a year between two locations. If migration occurs twice annually, there must be something that tells the bird when to start, how far to fly and when to stop and return. This information is partly 'hard-wired' into the birds, in its genes, while some is learnt. Changes to the outside environment such as changes in food availability, weather and competition also provide cues to the birds. The 'hard-wired' information controls migratory direction; changes in behaviour; changes in body fat and feeding; and the timing of breeding, moult and migration.

Nomadic species typically leave an area when resources (such as food, water and space) become limited and stop moving when resource-rich areas are reached. Migratory birds on the other hand have defined breeding and over-wintering regions. This implies that they must know how far to travel and which direction to fly in. So, how do birds know which way to fly?

Many migratory birds are able to orientate themselves in a specific direction. This orientation is genetically inherited. These birds are known to use 'compass orientation' and inherit a specific angle. It has been shown in various European migrants that the orientation angle can be changed or even 'bred-out' of birds. However, migratory species still need a reference point. Migratory birds are able to follow their angle by using external references like the sun, stars and an internal magnetic compass. Orientation using sun and stellar cues must be learnt, whereas the internal magnetic compass is genetically inherited. Recent research has shown they detect the magnetic field through a particular pigment or light receptor in their eyes.

Some migratory birds do not genetically inherit an angle but learn a map. Typically, the birds would learn this map within their first migration and are able to recognise specific features of their over-wintering ground and migratory route. It is possible that the Swift Parrot, that shows yearly variation in the sites it visits on the mainland, may use a mixture of compass orientation and map orientation. Birds may rely on map orientation to remember and navigate to particular stands of forest in different years.

Birds can migrate during the day or night or both. Day migrants typically rely on food sources that occur in small patches. Many day migrants search for food in flocks and gather at communal roost sites. These sites may act as 'information centres' whereby birds who have been successful in their search for food the day before, leave the communal roost to return, allowing birds which have had less successful searches to 'tag-on'. Flocking may make it easier for birds to follow their migratory direction, find feeding sites, and be less vulnerable to aggression and predation. The tinkling call of the Swift Parrot which volunteers are familiar with helps the birds stay in contact while in a flock.

There have been some changes to the migratory pathway of the Swift Parrot over the years. Migration up the coast of Eastern Australia would have provided more resources and been simpler when there was a large stretch of habitat reaching up the coast a couple of hundred years ago, and even simpler about 10,000 years ago when there was still a land bridge. This environment is still changing. Land clearing, fragmentation of the landscape, creation of urban bushland gardens, increased amount of hazardous things to collide into while flying swiftly and climate change continue to make migration increasingly difficult.

Most research on avian movements has been carried out on Northern Hemisphere nocturnal migrants. In the '50s bizarre experiments such as moving young birds miles away from their usual breeding grounds to see where they turn up when they do migrate revealed more information on just what cues birds are using to orientate their migration. However, migration research does not need to be so disruptive to the birds! The information collected by Swift Parrot volunteers helps build a picture of the movements of these birds. In the future the Swift Parrot Recovery Team hopes to work with scientists modelling climate change who will use these records.

Photo: Aleks Terauds

Swift Parrot cards available

Janet Flinn - Swift Parrots and other Australian Birds in Original Paintings, Prints and Cards.

Phone: 03 9560 5003

Email: jpflinn@bigpond.com

Web Site: www.users.bigpond.com/jpflinn

$3.50 each including postage

Artist: Janet Flynn

Monitoring of priority Swift Parrot sites in Victoria

By Garry Cheers

In 2003 The Department of the Environment and Heritage (DEH) formed an agreement with Bendigo Mining Limited (BML). Garry Cheers, operating under Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) is supported by BML to implement a survey program for identifying Swift Parrot foraging habitat in the Victorian Goldfields bio-region. The following are results of the BML Swift Parrot annual survey program of the 2006 survey season.

Surveys were conducted between 19-28/5 2006 and 30-7 & 10-8/2006, beginning half-an-hour after sun rise until half-an-hour before sun set. There are 40 sites in total which are surveyed twice a year. Table one shows results summarised for each region.

In May Swift Parrots were recorded foraging at 21 of the 40 priority sites and at one other site in the study area. In August Swift Parrots were recorded foraging at 19 of the 40 priority sites and at three other sites in the study area. Swift Parrots were recorded in six of the eight regions across the study area. The highest numbers in both May and August were recorded in the Maryborough-Dunolly region. Swift Parrots were recorded in four Ecological Vegetation Classes in May and five in August (table 2). The majority of sightings were in Box-Ironbark Forest, and from lower slopes or drainage lines.

While Swift Parrots were recorded using trees from 10cm to >60cm DBH, in most instances the foraging trees used were the largest in the site. Flowering abundance was also recorded. Grey Box flowered well although some early flowering wasn't producing nectar. White box flowered earlier than usual and Swift Parrots were seen taking advantage of this. In May there was good flower on Mugga Ironbark in the north-east and Red Ironbark in the central and western areas, but there was little nectar being produced from either species. In August, Swift Parrots in the Chiltern-Pilot National Park were seen feeding on small pockets of White Box which had less flowering than the surrounding areas which were controlled by large numbers of Noisy Friarbirds. Inter-species aggression was recorded at four sites in May and three sites in August. In all cases the aggressors were Red Wattlebirds or Noisy Friarbirds.

Table 1: Regional distribution of foraging sites and numbers of Swift Parrots recorded.

Region	May Total	Aug Total
Maryborough-Dunolly	266	238
Castlemaine	0	0
St. Arnaud	22	21
Rushworth	35	6
Bendigo	73	127
Heathcote	124	116
North-East	66	99
Stawell	0	0
Total	586	607

Table 2: Ecological Vegetation Classes at Swift Parrot foraging sites.

	May	Aug	Total Sites
Box-Ironbark Forest	27	31	58
Grassy Woodland	7	8	15
Heathy Dry Forest	1	2	3
Grassy Dry Forest	0	2	2
Alluvial Terraces Herb-rich Woodland	6	3	9

Calendar of Events

Date	Event	Time	Details	Organisation	Contact
27 April	Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater Workshop	10.00am - 4pm	Epsom Pottery, Bendigo, VIC	Hosted by North Central CMA	Enquires: Adrian Martins (North Central CMA), phone: 03 5440 1851; Peter Johnson (DSE), ph: 03 5430 4358. Bookings (essential): Rhonda Leed (North Central CMA), ph: 03 5448 7124
5/6 May	Tree planting, NSW		Capertee Valley, some accommodation and camping	Regent Honeyeater Recovery Team	*Regent Honeyeater Recovery Team: David Geering
12-13 May	World Migratory Bird Day				See www.worldmigratorybirdday.org for details. Register on the site to plan an event
19/20 May	Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater Survey Weekend		Surveys on mainland	Swift Parrot Recovery Team, Regent Honeyeater Recovery Team	*Swift Parrot Recovery Team: Belinda Cooke (for NSW, QLD, SA and for general enquires) Garry Cheers (for surveys in VIC) Regent Honeyeater Recovery Team: David Geering
30 May	Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater Workshop	10.00am - 4pm	Inverell, NSW	Hosted by DEC and Border Gwydir Rivers CMA	Enquires and Bookings (essential): Kathleen Davies (DEC), ph: 0428 243 944, Kathleen.Davies@environment.nsw.gov.au
3 July	Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater Workshop	10.00am - 4pm	Moruya, NSW	Hosted by DEC	Enquires and Bookings (essential): David Geering (Regent Honeyeater Recovery Team, DEC)*
4/5 Aug	Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater Survey Weekend		Surveys on mainland	Swift Parrot Recovery Team, Regent Honeyeater Recovery Team	*Swift Parrot Recovery Team: Belinda Cooke (for NSW, QLD, SA and for general enquires) Garry Cheers (for surveys in VIC) Regent Honeyeater Recovery Team: David Geering
11/12 Aug 25/26 Aug 8/9 Sept 22/23 Sept	Tree planting, Victoria		Near Benalla, 2 1/2 hours from Melbourne, free accommodation, BBQ and bushdance	Regent Honeyeater Recovery Team	Ray Thomas Phone: 03 5761 1515 Email: Raydavidthomas@hotmail.com

Please start thinking about where you intend to survey during the 2007 survey weekends. Get in touch with the relevant coordinator to tell them where you are surveying or if you would like to have a new site recommended.

Contact details:

Swift Parrot Recovery Team:
Belinda Cooke (for NSW, QLD, SA and for general enquires)
Freecall: 1800 66 57 66
Phone: 02 6298 9733
Email: swiftparrots@yahoo.com.au

Garry Cheers (for surveys in VIC)
Phone: 03 5461 2970
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Regent Honeyeater Recovery Team:
David Geering
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Email: David.Geering@environment.nsw.gov.au

swifts across the strait

Wielangta – an overview

Wielangta State Forest in Tasmania has been the focus of much current debate and a court case that is currently undergoing appeal. The case is based around three threatened species: Swift Parrots, who breed in the forest, Tasmanian Wedge-tailed Eagles and the Broad-toothed Stag Beetle.

Greens Senator Bob Brown made an application for an injunction to restrain Forestry Tasmania from logging in the Wielangta State Forest, using section 475 of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (the *EPBC Act*). The EPBC Act is the Commonwealth's major piece of environmental protection legislation. Senator Brown's case outlined that the EPBC Act states a person must not take an action that has, or will have, a significant impact on a listed threatened species included in the 'endangered' category, without an approval from the Commonwealth Environment Minister. Senator Brown claimed that the Tasmanian Regional Forest Agreement 1997 is not a RFA within the meaning of the EPBC Act, that Forestry Tasmania's operations in the Wielangta are likely to have a significant impact on threatened species.

On 19th Dec 2006 the Federal Court ruled that Forestry Tasmania failed to protect the three threatened species. The Court found that Tasmania's Regional Forestry Agreement (RFA) does not allow a blanket exemption from environmental requirements for forestry activities. Forestry Tasmania needs to comply with obligations under the RFA in order to get exemption from the EPBC Act, and it was found that Forestry Tasmania had not done enough under the RFA. An injunction was placed on Forestry Tasmania's operations to cease commercial forestry in the area. Bob Brown stated that:

Logging on Tasmania's Bruny Island, another important area of Swift Parrot breeding habitat under threat.

"This is a watershed case for the nation's rare and endangered species... The logging and burning of forest habitats is damaging to the creatures which depend on those habitats. The word 'protect' means 'protect', not log, cut-down or burn".

The Premier of Tasmania, Paul Lennon, stated that the decision could potentially adversely affect all of the state's forests and agriculture. A view echoed by the Managing Director of Forestry Tasmania, Bob Gordon and Senator Eric Abetz (Australian Minister for Fisheries, Forestry and Conservation). Mr Lennon called for the Prime Minister to intervene. On 9th February 2007, Forestry Tasmania announced their plan to appeal. A joint statement released by Malcolm Turnbull MP (Australian Minister for the Environment and Water Resources) and Senator Eric Abetz announced that the Commonwealth would be intervening "in order to clarify technical issues relating to the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999."

On the 23rd February Prime Minister John Howard and Tasmanian Premier Paul Lennon put forward their amendments to the RFA. Senator Eric Abetz expressed the view that these were minor alterations. Bob Brown commented: "Mr Howard and Mr Lennon say that, without change to logging impacts, they can stare down this ruling by simply writing their contrary opinion into the Regional Forest Agreement." One of the notable alterations is a particular clause in which the State "agrees to protect priority species" which will be changed to the parties simply agreeing that the reserve and management system protects threatened species. Senator Bob Brown has indicated that he will fight the appeal against the Federal Court ruling.

For more facts about this case, please visit http://www.bobbrown.org.au/100_home.php, http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200612/s1815817.htm

Please send all newsletter contributions and Swift Parrot records to the Recovery Team:
Swift Parrot Recovery Coordinator,
PO Box 2115 Queanbeyan, NSW 2620.
Freecall: 1800 66 57 66
Email: swiftparrots@yahoo.com.au

Special thanks to the Murray Catchment Management Authority (CMA) for sponsoring the Swift Parrot Recovery Program for the past 2 years.

Newsletter editor – Belinda Cooke.
This newsletter is printed on Australian made, 100% recycled paper.