



Conservation

DON SAUNDERS AND JENNY LAU

Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo feather. Photo: Jennifer Rogers

FEW DUCKS BUT ANOTHER DUCK SEASON

In a media release dated 30 December 2009, under the misleading heading “Restricted Duck Season Strikes Right Balance” the Acting Victorian Minister for Environment and Climate Change, Mr Holding, announced that there will be a duck shooting season in Victoria in 2010.

The so-called restricted season will run for 72 days (20 March to 30 May) which Holding states is “two weeks shorter than the normal season”. He really means that it is only two weeks shorter than the maximum period allowed under the Wildlife (Game) Regulations 2001. Due to drought conditions, which continue, there have only been four years in the ten seasons since 2001 when the maximum duck hunting period was approved.

The media release also states that shooters will be allowed five game ducks (a maximum of one Australasian Shoveler) plus an additional three Wood Ducks, a total of eight each hunting day. This is claimed to be “significantly below the traditional ten bag limit”!

Porter and Kingsford’s annual Aerial Survey of Wetland Birds in Eastern Australia – October 2009 showed there had been some increase in the number of “game” duck species, which is to be expected following the significant flooding in the Diamantina and Georgina river systems in January 2009 and the provision of environmental flows to the Macquarie Marshes and Lowbidgee Wetlands. In fact, one of the ten transects (transect eight in Queensland) had one-third of all waterbirds counted in the survey.

In summarising the results of the 2009 count, Porter and Kingsford state:

“Trend analyses indicated continued long term declines in waterbird abundance, wetland area, breeding abundance and breeding species richness. Wetland area and breeding abundance declined in 2009 compared to the previous year while total abundance and breeding species richness increased slightly.”

In Victoria, the annual November count of waterbirds by the Department of Sustainability and Environment showed that

game bird numbers were “slightly” down on last year, which means that they are at very low levels. The Department recommended against a hunting season in 2009 but the Brumby Government decided otherwise. For 2010 the game duck numbers in Victoria are further reduced yet the Government approves a longer season and an increased bag limit!

BOCA continues to oppose the recreational hunting of native birds under any circumstances.

Reference: Porter, JL and Kingsford, RT, Aerial Survey of Wetland Birds in Eastern Australia – October 2009 Annual Summary Report, The University of New South Wales.

PLANNING PROTECTION FOR RED-TAILED BLACK-COCKATOO

An amendment to the West Wimmera Planning Scheme (Vic) to better protect habitat for the nationally endangered south-eastern subspecies of Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo has been approved by the Minister for Planning.

The West Wimmera Shire had in place an Environmental Significance Overlay to its planning scheme to protect breeding habitat of the Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo. However, these birds are specialist feeders relying almost entirely on the seeds of three tree species: Buloke, Brown Stringybark and Desert Stringybark, much of which occurs as remnants on private property, often as scattered paddock trees.

Amendment C19 expands the level of protection to cover both breeding and feeding habitat.

The environmental objectives for the revised Environmental Significance Overlay (ES02) are:

- To protect the habitat of the endangered Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo.
- To ensure the availability of suitable nesting sites for the Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo through the protection of live and dead hollow bearing trees and other suitable trees within the bird’s known nesting area.

- To protect the feeding habitat of the Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo through the retention of Buloke and Stringybark trees.

Under the provisions of ESO2 an application for a permit would have to be made:

- To remove, destroy or lop dead eucalyptus trees with trunk diameter greater than 40 centimetres at 1.3 metres above ground level.
- To remove, destroy or lop live vegetation which is:
 - a hollow bearing eucalypt tree
 - Buloke with a trunk diameter of greater than 20 centimetres at 1.3 metre above ground level
 - Buloke with a density of more than 1 tree per 10 hectares of development
 - Stringybark with a trunk diameter of greater than 30 centimetres at 1.3 metre above ground level.

The West Wimmera Shire and the Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo Recovery Team, with strong support from Government agencies and NGO's, have achieved an excellent outcome.

WIN FOR TASMANIAN BIRDS

The Bird Observer August 2004 carried an article about a massive development proposal at Ralphs Bay, Lauderdale, 20 km south-east of Hobart. The article encouraged BOCA members to write to Tasmanian politicians opposing the proposal because of potential loss of very valuable shorebird habitat.

Following a three year assessment process, the Tasmanian Planning Commission (formerly the Resource Planning and Development Commission) released its draft assessment in late October 2009 concluding that the 470 lot canal development should not proceed. Reasons given for its decision included the impact on the large resident population of Australian Pied Oystercatchers (300-400 throughout the year) and on migratory waders.

The draft assessment was available for public comment for 28 days during which Birds Tasmania made a further submission. The Commission's final report will now be forwarded to the Premier for a decision on whether the project should proceed.

RAY THOMAS CONSERVATIONIST OF THE YEAR

Congratulations to Ray Thomas who has been named Conservationist of the Year in the Australian Geographic Society's annual awards 2009.

For 15 years Ray has been directing one of the most active volunteer conservation projects in Australia – the Regent Honeyeater Project in Benalla, Victoria. During this time Ray and his teams have replanted about 1,110 ha of land, working with more than 110 local landholders restoring an ecosystem that will benefit both wildlife and the farmers.

Ray grew up in Euroa, Victoria, and taught high school chemistry, science and maths for more than 20 years. Bushwalking established Ray's passion for native plants and he began collecting and propagating seeds.

The Regent Honeyeater Project began in 1994 when Ray worked as a wildlife officer for the Victorian Department of Conservation and Environment (now the Department of Sustainability and Environment) but, soon after, he began coordinating the project independently. Ray gains support through grants and donations and works with landholders – 95 per cent of the planting projects have been on private land.

In *The Bird Observer*, August 2009, Ray provided an interesting insight into the way that the Regent Honeyeater Project had benefitted Grey-crowned Babblers.

Well done Ray – a very well deserved award.

NEW GUIDELINES FOR ASSESSING IMPACTS ON MIGRATORY SHOREBIRDS

The Federal Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA) has released draft guidelines for assessing significant impacts on migratory shorebirds. The guidelines aim to provide project proponents with information on the ecology and habitat requirements of migratory shorebirds and propose new criteria for determining whether actions will have a significant impact on migratory shorebirds and their habitat.

BOCA commented on the guidelines, agreeing that international criteria for identifying important shorebird sites (eg sites that support 1% of the flyway population) do not provide adequate protection for migratory shorebird sites in Australia where shorebird populations are more dispersed. The guidelines outline new criteria for recognising important migratory shorebird sites in Australia, namely sites that support:

- 0.1% of the flyway population of a single species; or
- at least 2,000 migratory shorebirds; or
- at least 15 migratory shorebird species.

The guidelines also recognise that Latham's Snipe requires separate criteria, as the species does not commonly aggregate in large flocks or use similar habitat to many of the coastal species. The guidelines define important sites for Latham's Snipe are those that:

- support at least 18 individuals of the species, and
- are naturally occurring open freshwater wetland with vegetation cover nearby (for example, tussock grasslands, sedges, lignum or reeds within 100m of the wetland).

BOCA's submission strongly supported the guidelines as they should provide greater protection for important migratory shorebird sites.