

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 are the longest migrating parrots in the world, leaving their breeding grounds in Tasmania during Autumn to winter on mainland Australia, and returning in the Spring. The sporadic and seemingly unpredictable movement of the parrots mean that a large number of people are needed to keep track of its distribution, and to collect information on the bird's habitat requirements.

A national Swift Parrot survey is conducted on the third weekend in May and the first weekend in August each year. Observers from Eastern South Australia through to Southern Queensland look for Swift Parrots in an effort to trace the movements of this rare and elusive species. This publication gives bird observers feedback on results from their search efforts, provides insight into the behaviour and habitat requirements of this charismatic species, enables volunteers to share their experiences and aims to stimulate interest and involvement in the National Swift Parrot Recovery Program.

Searching for Swifty nests

by Matt Webb, Threatened Species Unit, Nature Conservation Branch, DPIWE

It has generally been thought that Blue gum flowering in southeast Tasmania drives swift parrot breeding activity and recruitment to the population, however, there is little data on swift parrot breeding activity from year to year. This summer was a great season for blue gum flowering and therefore an opportune time to initiate a study further investigating the relationship between swift parrots and Blue gums. Our first hurdle was to find some nests.

During November and December 2004 we searched for swift parrot nests in southeast Tassie with great success. A total of 43 nests were found at four different sites on Maria Is., Bruny Is., and 2 areas around Hobart. Nests were often in close proximity to each other and some nest trees were as close as 10-15 m to each other. At one site in the foothills of Mt. Wellington, 26 nests were found in 45 hectares of dry Eucalypt forest. Similarly, on Maria Island 10 nests were found in a small area along a ridgeline, with one stringybark (*E. obliqua*) supporting 4 active nests (Figure 1) and another white gum (*E. viminalis*) had 2 nests. Such high densities of swift parrot nests have important implications for conservation and management. Disturbance of high density nesting areas, even on a small scale, has the potential to significantly affect the species, highlighting the importance of identifying and protecting these areas. Basically, if you find one swifty nest, chances are there's several more close by.



Swift parrot chicks rescued from a fallen tree.
Photo: M. Webb

Another benefit arising from the project will be the updating of the description of swift parrot nesting habitat for council planners and environmental consultants.

This coming spring/summer (2005) these sites will be revisited to check for activity of known nests and hopefully find some new ones. By revisiting known nesting sites each year and comparing breeding activity with Blue gum flowering intensity we can begin to answer some important questions:

- Are nesting sites used sporadically depending on flowering events?
- Does better flowering in an area mean more nesting and a higher survival rate to fledging?
- Will some birds still attempt to breed in poor flowering years, or search for better foraging areas elsewhere?

Next season we are hoping to form a group, including volunteers, to assist in finding new nesting areas and check known nests to see if they are being used again next summer. Searches will also be conducted in other areas to build a better picture of breeding activity along the east coast of the state and identify key nesting areas that require protection.

The Swifties of Muckleford

by Deborah Worland, Victorian Volunteer

I got up early one morning and decided to go for a walk around the Castlemaine Golf Course, it was April 28th, thought to myself, well in 2001 they arrived on Anzac day, none in 2002/3 due to the drought. But this year the conditions were perfect, plenty of lerps, Yellow gum was just starting to flower, some ironbarks were flowering and there was a bit of water in the dams. I got to my favourite birding spot about 8am and heard the familiar call of the swifties. They were back.

The first morning there were about 5 to 10 birds but as the days passed they numbered between 50 to 100 birds every day. I think the best thing I have seen them doing this year is feeding on the ground. Since the middle of July I have seen them on the ground 17 times in groups of sometimes 2 or 3 birds, sometimes 30 birds, one morning there were four groups on the ground totalling 70 swifties feeding. On the morning of August 11th I saw a small group of six birds on the ground, two of the swifties were actually using their beaks to dig up the ground (quite strongly) and then used their feet to scratch and move the dirt. I don't know what they

were eating. I don't think it was lerps, but in the area in which they were feeding, which was nearly always in the exact same spot, there were different types of moss. I also watched them early in the mornings, usually after some rain or a frost, having a bath in a large puddle in a creek bed, sometimes up to 20 birds at a time, the rest were hanging just above the puddle in some coffee bush waiting for their turn. When the puddle had dried up but there had been a heavy frost I could see the swifties in the top most tips of some Yellow gums having a wash in the dew that was still on the leaves and then waiting for the sun to hit the tops of the trees to dry themselves. One foggy and drizzly Sunday morning I went out with Tom & Noela, who love the swifties too, we saw a small group of birds feeding in a cootamundra wattle. In the last couple of weeks the birds are starting to spread out over a larger area to feed, the golden wattle is in full flower. I have had reported sightings of the swifties in Sawmill Road Castlemaine, Fryerstown and Glenluce but the swifties still seem to come back each night to roost at the Muckleford sight.

Lerp from Eucalyptus leaves often fall to the ground, however it is uncertain what the Swift Parrots were actually feeding on at Muckleford.
Photo: D. Saunders

Swift Parrots ruined my life

David Schlunke, NSW Land Owner

Early 50's. Possibly in retreat from a slightly weird and dysfunctional family life I began to realise that birds were definitely lovelier companions than most humans. I began truanting from school and spending days in the bush watching birds.

Winter 1955. Large flocks of lorikeets coming to the ironbark blossoms. Using my battered copy of Cayley and an ex-army telescopic sight I identified Little lorikeets, hundreds of them, and a few Purple crowns...

And then something quite new and strange:

A parrot that swoops and flies at incredible speed in tight frenetic flocks. I identified it from Cayley as Swift Parrot. I spent days perched in a large pink flowering ironbark watching them come and go at close quarters. I was more bird than human that winter.

1960. I left school and had to join the world of employment and economic "realities".

It was very difficult to renounce my birdship and become a human. Although my career took off promisingly my spiritual life became empty.

1970. I left Sydney a nervous wreck and returned to the Temora district. We began visiting areas of bush. On one such visit a large flock of Swift Parrots swooped out of an ironbark tree and I was transfixed. The world of economic rationalism crashed. We made inquiries and found that this area of bush was due to be bulldozed. We contacted the owners and I signed away my disposable income for the next twenty years. We called the area Big Bush and built a mud brick house in the middle.

National Parks eventually bought most of Big Bush from us. The Little Lorikeets dwindled and now no longer visit Big Bush, but the Swift Parrots still come back every winter when there are blossoms.

In the early days at Big Bush it was difficult to talk to any of the neighbours about our reason for buying it. We had a small circle of friends who loved the bush and understood. They would sometimes relay to us the rumours circulating about us from the pubs and shearing sheds: bemusing but horrifying; and sometimes quite awful for our kids on the school bus.

I think most of the neighbours sensed that we were involved with values that bypassed if not transcended those espoused by the world of materialism. Some were hostile but others wanted to understand. I think one or two actually began to see what it was all about.

As the years went by and "Conservation" came to mean more than just soil conservation; and "Ecology" and "Wildlife" entered the vocabulary things became easier for us. There are still hostile rednecks around, (we still have difficult moments with certain neighbours shooting our kangaroos and wallabies) but we are more generally accepted these days. Some folks try to look wise and say our place will be "worth millions" one day.

The greatest reward for me is intimate contact with the natural world, and seeing creatures like the Swift Parrots coming here; being privileged to get a glimpse of how birds see their world; living in the bush with the seasonal changes year after year; and still new

species popping up occasionally (I saw my first Regent Honey-eater last year). As the years go by I feel more aware of how little I know; and indeed, the impossibility (and irrelevancy?) of "knowing".

Being in an ecosystem is the only way I know of finding ones place and relevance in the universe and this, I believe, is the ultimate goal.

I think lots of folks now realise that there is more to life than economic "realities".

The greatest sickness today is loss of contact with the natural world and the belief that economic rationalism can deliver happiness. All civilisations that have survived thousands of years have enshrined the natural world in their culture and religions.

Trying to find substitutes for the lost natural world is where the trouble arises.



David Schlunke on his property Big Bush, near Temora, NSW. David has a conservation agreement on the property which is regularly visited by Swift Parrots.

Queensland news

David Stewart, Queensland Environment Protection Authority

Following up from the 2003 season when there was a complete absence of Swift Parrots in Queensland, Swift Parrots again came back to Queensland in 2004. All of the sightings last year were from Brisbane suburbs: Kenmore, Taringa and Mt Crosby. In Kenmore there were at least 12 birds that stayed around for a number of days feeding in Forest Red gums *Eucalyptus tereticornis* enabling many local birdwatchers to observe these birds.

During the winter of 2004, the Yellow Box *Eucalyptus melliodora* was in flower in many areas of the Great Dividing Range and the western slopes, some of these areas were surveyed for Swift Parrots, but to no avail. It is planned to get out to what looked like promising Swift Parrot / Regent Honeyeater habitat again this year during the National surveys and when possible in between those dates.



Forest Red gum in flower on the north coast of NSW. Photo: D. Saunders

NSW habitat protection

The following ecological communities providing habitat for Swift Parrots have been listed as Endangered by the NSW Scientific Committee under the *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995*:

- River-Flat Eucalypt Forest on Coastal Floodplains of the NSW North Coast, Sydney Basin and South East Corner bioregions;
- Subtropical Coastal Floodplain Forest of the NSW North Coast bioregion; and
- Swamp Sclerophyll Forest on Coastal Floodplains of the NSW North Coast, Sydney Basin and South East Corner bioregions.

These coastal communities are under constant pressure from development and this listing should give them more protection as urban and industrial areas increase along the entire coast of NSW. The key species that occur within these communities that are regularly used by Swift Parrots are Forest Red gum, Coastal Grey Box, Swamp Mahogany and Bangalay. These habitats provide critical habitat for Swift Parrots in most years, but are of particular importance in years of drought such as during 2002 when the majority of the population resided in coastal NSW.

Swift Parrots in Tasmania

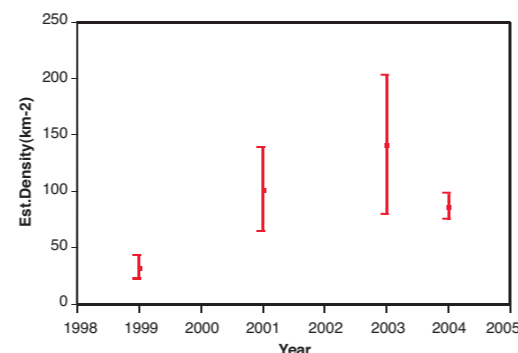
– trends in numbers looks positive

Stephen Mallick, *Threatened Species Unit, Nature Conservation Branch, DPIWE*

Swift Parrots started arriving in Tasmania in early August, which is slightly earlier than usual. The birds encountered some early flowering Black gum, but quickly moved to the Blue gum which was well in flower by mid-September. The Blue gum flowered consistently over most of its range throughout south-eastern and eastern Tasmania and birds were observed in most of their usual locations. Overall, the Blue gum flowering was exceptionally good in 2004, following on from a good year in 2003.

The annual population monitoring was conducted in October and November 2004. Seventy three sites in grassy Blue gum forest were visited and a 30 minute point survey carried out at each site. The number of Swift Parrots observed in each 30 minutes, and the distance and angle of each bird, were recorded for each site. This survey provides an index of abundance for the entire Swift Parrot population, and allows us to track any trends in numbers of time.

The annual monitoring as been carried out since 1999, although only the data from years when there were good flowering and many birds provides an index of numbers. This occurred in 1999, 2001, 2003 and last year 2004. The best estimates for the four effective annual surveys since 1999 are shown below.



Four Swift parrot nest hollows in a large *Eucalyptus obliqua* on Maria Island. Photo: M. Webb

The density estimates for 2004 were much less variable than the previous two surveys (2001 and 2003). This probably reflects the consistently good flowering over the majority of the sites where swift parrots were observed in 2004, leading to a relatively 'even' distribution of birds across the habitat. Overall, the density index suggests a positive trend since monitoring began in 1999, although the early apparent rise in the index has flattened out somewhat. Statistically speaking, there is unlikely to be any significant difference in the density estimates for 2001, 2003 and 2004. However, the difference between the index for the first (1999) and last (2004) estimate is likely to be significant, suggesting that Swift Parrot numbers are not decreasing and could potentially be on the increase. However, further estimates are required to determine the robustness of this result.

Swift Parrot surveys and drowning birds?

I am always impressed by the amount of information provided to the recovery team on the volunteer survey sheets, from short notes to extensive stories of individual experiences whilst out searching for swifties. The following story caught my attention as I was going through the hundreds of sheets and thought that it highlighted the weird and wonderful experiences volunteers sometimes have when they participate in our bi-annual surveys each year.

partially submerged log – all in an afternoons birdwatching!

So you don't miss out on all the action, mark the following dates in your diary for the 2005 volunteer survey weekends:

- May 14/15th (third weekend in May each year)
- August 6th/7th (first weekend in August each year)

David Parker wrote: At 16.05 two Swift Parrots came down to drink on Billabong Creek at Walbundrie, south west NSW. A second attempt to drink was disturbed by the arrival of Red Rumped Parrots to quench their thirst. All parrots then took off in a hurry upon the arrival of a Collared Sparrowhawk. The Sparrowhawk then attempted to take out a Tawny Frogmouth by knocking it off its branch and pushing it down into the water. The attempt failed when both birds hit the water and the frogmouth scrambled onto a



Bright plumage and yellow iris of an adult Swift Parrot. Photo: G.Dabb

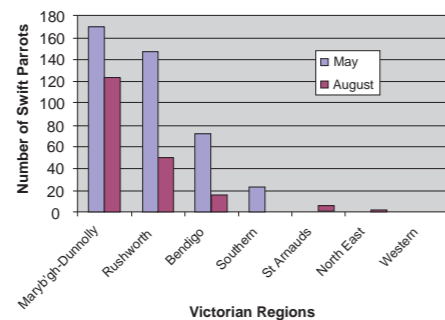
Survey Round Up

The 2004 season proved a challenging one, with all birds occurring in small flocks, scattered throughout their winter range. It is usual to find hundreds of Swift Parrots concentrated in at least two regions of central Victoria, however this year the largest flocks recorded contained approximately 60 birds. These occurred in the Castlemaine area in the central goldfields of Victoria and the Temora area on south western slopes of NSW. Despite the challenges of finding this endangered and often cryptic species, the dedicated network of recovery program volunteers conducted over 900 surveys across eastern Australia in 2004. This resulted in 588 and 274 Swift Parrots being recorded in the Autumn and Winter surveys respectively. However, the volunteer efforts go beyond these synchronised surveys, with many volunteers submitting forms throughout the season resulting in over 860 Swift Parrots being recorded. A breakdown of the results state by state are provided here for the 2004 season.

Lake Cathie volunteers participating in the bi-annual Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater surveys. Photo: D. Saunders



Figure 1 - Victorian Regional Swift Parrot Records 2004 Volunteer Surveys



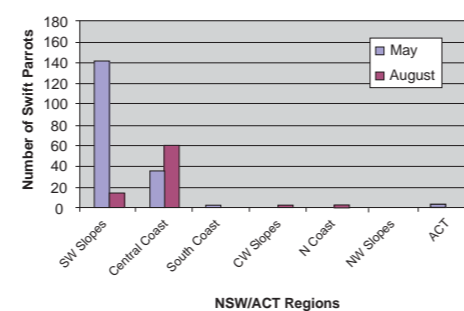
Victoria

During the 2004 season in Victoria, 406 Swift Parrots were recorded in the May survey and 198 Swift Parrots were recorded in the August survey (Table 1). The majority of these birds were located in the Maryborough-Dunolly and Rushworth areas (Figure 1). Similar to last season, the Swift Parrots tended to occur in small, relatively quiet flocks, making it challenging to find the birds across the broad landscape. Throughout the season Swift Parrots in Victoria were predominantly found in Box Ironbark and Grassy Box Woodlands. The major food sources in Victoria this year were nectar in Red Ironbark and Yellow gum, as well as lerps on Grey Box, Yellow Box and Yellow gum.

New South Wales

During the 2004 season in NSW, 178 Swift Parrots were recorded during the May survey and 76 during the August survey (Table 1). These records predominantly came from the south west slopes and central coast areas (Figure 2). Throughout the season Swift Parrots were found scattered across the state using a variety of different habitat types. In the coastal regions they were predominantly feeding in Swamp Mahogany, Forest Red gum and Blackbutt habitats. On the western slopes they were predominantly feeding on lerps in Grey Box, Yellow Box and Mugga Ironbark as well as nectar from Mugga Ironbark and Grey Box.

Figure 2 - NSW/ACT Regional Swift Parrot Records 2004 Volunteer Surveys



Queensland

Queensland had Swift Parrots in both the Brisbane and Warwick areas this year with the largest flocks being 12 birds. In Brisbane the birds were present for a couple of months, feeding in flowering Forest Red gums, whereas further west near Warwick and Walloon up to six birds were recorded feeding on nectar of Broad-leaved Ironbark and Coastal Grey Box.

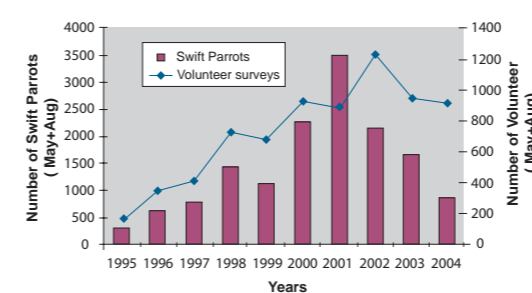
Australian Capital Territory

It has been an interesting year in the ACT with Swift Parrots being recorded passing through the ACT on both their northerly and southerly migrations. This is the third consecutive year that Swift Parrots have been recorded in the ACT on their northerly migration, however records currently held suggest that this was the first time Swift Parrots have been recorded in the ACT on their southerly migration. Four birds were recorded in May and 16 birds being recorded in September which is the second largest record for the ACT. The Swift Parrots on both occasions appeared to be in transit with no further records in the surrounding areas despite further searches.

Survey effort

Surveys submitted for the National Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater Survey Weekends totaled 956 surveys (540 in May and 416 in August) (Figure 3). Of these surveys, 298 were from Victoria, 557 were from New South Wales and 101 were from Queensland.

Figure 3 - Swift Parrot Volunteer Surveys 1995-2004



Department of Defence and Swift Parrot Surveys

By Natasha James

The Department of Defence Riverina Murray Valley Region (RMV) recently took part in the Swift Parrot - Regent Honeyeater Survey. The survey was undertaken at Wirlinga Military Base near Albury, NSW.

Braving the weather to undertake the survey was a two person team consisting of Warrant Officer Dennis Weston from the Gaza Ridge Barracks Army Logistic Training Centre and Natasha James, the Regional Environmental Officer.

The survey was considered a success although only one Swift Parrot and no Regent Honeyeaters were sighted during the survey period. Besides raising the profile of Swift Parrots within Defence other benefits included

the additional species data collected for Wirlinga.

The initial sighting of Swift Parrots on Wirlinga in June 2004 brought about the inaugural participation by Defence RMV in the survey.

Swift Parrots were present at Wirlinga over several successive weeks and were estimated at approximately 25 individuals making this, according to the Department of Environment and Conservation, one of the largest flocks sighted in the Murray catchment area.

Wirlinga also provides habitat for the State listed Black Chinned Honeyeater and Diamond Firetail and it is believed that the State listed Squirrel Glider and Barking Owl may frequent the site.

Grassy woodlands north of Wirlinga on the south west slopes of NSW. Photo: D. Saunders



Biodiversity project on the sheep wheat belt

Grassy Box Woodland Conservation Management Network Partnership

The aim of this project is to increase awareness and understanding of key threatened species and endangered or depleted ecological communities of the NSW western slopes (Sheep-Wheat Belt) and to provide decision-making tools to land-managers and planners to improve the conservation management of these species and communities.

There are two approaches to achieving the project aim:

1. The Grassy Box Woodland Conservation Management Network; and
2. Biodiversity Action Planning (ie identification of conservation priority areas and actions).

1. The Grassy Box Woodland Conservation Management Network

The Grassy Box Woodland Conservation Management Network (CMN) is an identified action in the draft recovery plan of the NSW listed "White Box-Yellow Box-Blakely's Red gum" Endangered Ecological Community (EEC) and in the draft recovery plan for the Commonwealth listed "Grassy White Box Woodlands".

The CMN aims to redress the poor conservation status of this highly fragmented ecological community by providing a framework to coordinate the protection and management of remnants. Products delivered by the CMN include:

- Investigate and promote opportunities for long-term protection for high conservation value sites;
- Develop a database of member sites including survey, site history and geographic data;
- Network support;
- Build links with landscape planning decision-makers and influencers;
- Produce CMN newsletters, website and email;
- Produce interpretive signs for high profile sites; and
- Hold CMN field days, training days and workshops.

2. Biodiversity Action Planning

For the Biodiversity Action Planning component of the project, tools to assist landscape planning decision-makers will be developed. These tools will be aimed at raising the understanding and awareness of the ecosystems of the NSW Sheep-Wheat belt. These tools will be built from historic and project-collected data to inform, for example, CMA's (Catchment Management Authorities), and other government planners. The tools will assist planners by using logical and repeatable methodology to identify the former extent of vegetation communities in the regions of interest and present data on the current known extent of these communities. Some analysis of collected data will

be used to present the types of management actions that may enhance or detract from the habitat qualities of remnant communities with particular attention to the requirements of declining or threatened woodland bird species. Products delivered by the 'Biodiversity Action Planning' component of the project include:

- Identify and collate existing survey data sets for threatened and depleted vegetation communities and target woodland bird species;
- Identify gaps in existing data sets and organise contractors and DEC staff to survey to a selected pro-forma in data deficient areas;
- Use Geographic Information System (GIS) technology to predict the former extent of threatened and depleted vegetation communities across the NSW Sheep-Wheat belt;
- Map predicted remnants of conservation significance;
- Manage collected data for dissemination through appropriate networks;
- Production of 'Habitat Protection and Enhancement Guidelines' for target bird species based on analysis of collected data; and
- If possible, establish links with the National Land and Water Resources Audit, especially in relation to monitoring and evaluation.

For more information or to join the network contact Toni McLeish on 02 6298 9709 or email toni.mcleish@environment.nsw.gov.au

Discovering the Swift Parrot

Bill Boyd, NSW volunteer

I received my introduction to birds at about six years of age. My grandfather was the culprit and he had a very good knowledge of the bush and all things in it. He presented me with "What Bird Is That?" for my sixth birthday and it has hardly been closed since.

Although I was interested in any and all of the birds in those pages the parrots were my favourites.

In 1957 at age 11, I saw a parrot for the first time that would change my life forever. Every spotted gum for miles around was in full flower. I lived as I still do in Belmont on the north-eastern side of Lake Macquarie

and I had just returned home from a two week school holiday in Molong on the central west slopes. What stories I could tell my mates, I had seen Apostle Birds, White Winged Choughs, Brown Tree Creepers, White Plumed Honeyeaters, Galahs, Red-rumped Parrots and others too numerous to mention. But it all faded into the background when one of my mates said, "wait till you see all the parrots in Nans' backyard." His grandmother had a huge yard and it contained about 10 large spotted gums. The trees looked almost yellow there were so many blossoms on them.

It was May of that year and the skies were clear and there was no wind, it was a very nice autumn day. It soon got much better, the air was suddenly filled with bird calls I had not heard before and the sky filled with these fast green birds, whirling and whirring as they alighted in the large tree that overhung the fence, or at least half the flock did with the other half seeming to miss the tree on purpose so that they could wheel around one more time.

There were about 70 birds in that particular flock but we could see others landing in trees in back yards further down the hill. We estimated that there were probably more than 1000 birds in our immediate area but we found out later that there were also flocks in the surrounding area.

We concentrated only on what was in front of us and as we didn't know what these birds were at the time we just watched and wondered. "What Bird Is That?" would help us and sure enough on the last parrot colour plate was our bird, looking a little plumpish than in real life and slightly out of character with his tail partly fanned but it was him, SWIFT PARROT, LATHAMUS DISCOLOUR to be precise and as he clambered lower down the tree and stuck his red face out through the blossoms only feet away I'm sure he was thinking, "I've got you now," and he was right.

I fell in love with the call, the colour, the speed and the precision and searched for every piece of information I could find. They stayed until late July and then were gone. It was as though they were never there, there was not a trace, not a single bird and it all seemed to happen overnight. Maybe it did! Where had they gone? Why? There was still some blossom. All was quiet and even though some Musk Lorikeets had appeared and some Little Lorikeets had moved in.

This fascination with Swift Parrots continues to this day, with regular sightings over the past 50 years throughout the Lake Macquarie area, with spectacular gatherings in 1966 and again in 2002. In 1966 I saw birds gathering into flocks that gradually grew to at least 2000 swifts which then roosted on an island in Lake Macquarie! Although the numbers were lower, 2002 was the best year for swift parrots in my area since the 1960s with many passing through my back yard. I hope the coming survey weekends (May and August) will prove productive. If not there is always next year.

Spotted gum habitat used by Swift Parrots in Coastal NSW. Photo: D. Saunders



Swifties out in the cold without better planning

The Mount Alexander Shire has been asked to consider the swift parrot in their current planning scheme review. A Swift Parrot Habitat Management Plan, developed for the Mount Alexander Shire by the Threatened Species Network*, was submitted to the Council in February for consideration. Flocks of the birds feed in the flowering box-ironbark forests in the local area nearly every winter, and it is well recognised for being a favourite spot for the swiftie. The area plays an important role in the survival of the bird, as well as a range of other species that share its habitat including the powerful owl, brush-tailed phascogale and black-chinned honeyeater.

Threatened Species Network Coordinator Julie Kirkwood said community groups and bird watching volunteers from the local area helped write the swift

parrot plan. They hope to see it adopted formally by the Shire as part of their planning scheme.

The Swift Parrot Habitat Management Plan provided to the Mount Alexander Shire lists key actions for protecting and enhancing local habitat. It also maps key areas of suitable swift parrot habitat. This is the result of extensive volunteer monitoring of the endangered bird undertaken in the area for the past 10 years, as part of the National Recovery Program.

"We are strongly urging Council to consider this information prior to finalising areas for rezoning within the Shire, as suggested under the proposed Amendment C24. The swift parrot plan provides the opportunity to use the local planning scheme for the maximum benefit of maintaining habitat for this endangered annual visitor", Julie said.

The Friends of Box-ironbark Forests helped in the preparation of the Swift Parrot Habitat Management Plan. President Doug Ralph said the Friend's group has strongly supported the adoption of the swift parrot plan in its submission to the Shire. "Rezoning for more housing before finding out what lives there could have a huge impact on species like the swift parrot", Mr Ralph said.

* The Threatened Species Network is a community based program of the Australian Government's Natural Heritage Trust and WWF Australia.

Juvenile Survival

by Debbie Saunders

In order to get a feeling for juvenile survivorship following the Swift Parrots' northward migration to the mainland, the proportion of juveniles in flocks were identified. A total of 53 birds were classified by age group in NSW, representing 36% of all Swift Parrots present at the six sites where age classification was possible. Overall juveniles accounted for 21% of the birds classified (11 juveniles and 42 adults) as detailed in Table 1. The percentage of juveniles recorded in May (42%) was relatively high compared to those recorded in August (15%). The proportion of juveniles recorded is likely to have been greater if more classifications had been undertaken earlier in the year since juvenile identification features become less distinct as the season progresses and the birds mature. This is highlighted by age classifications undertaken at Combaning State Forest #2 where 36% of the birds were juveniles (11 birds classified) in May but

Table 1: NSW Swift Parrot age classifications during 2004 migration

Site name	NSW Region	Date	Juvenile	Adult	Total Swift Parrots
Combaning State Forest #2	Central Western Slopes	May-04	4	7	40
Combaning State Forest #3	Central Western Slopes	May-04	1		10
Buff Point	Central Coast	Aug-04	3	4	10
Toukley	Central Coast	Aug-04	2	3	20
Budgewoi	Central Coast	Aug-04	1	1	6
Big Bush Sth	Central Western Slopes	Aug-04	0	19	20
Combaning State Forest #2	Central Western Slopes	Aug-04	0	8	40
2004 Total			11	42	146



Juvenile Swift Parrot soaking up the sunshine on a cold autumn morning. Photo: G. Dabb

100% of the birds in August were adults (8 birds classified). This photograph of an adult bird clearly shows the yellow iris, whereas juveniles have all or part of the iris dark brown in colour.

Swift Parrot Recovery Team – Member Profile

Debbie Saunders, Swift Parrot Recovery Team – Mainland Coordinator



I have always loved the Australian bush and despite being brought up in Sydney, most of my childhood memories are from bush camping trips, running barefoot through dry woodlands, getting covered head to toe in dirt and being bitten by bull ants. I have always found Australian wildlife absolutely fascinating, with the good old Koala being the first to capture my attention. My appreciation of wildlife has grown and diversified throughout my life, however a specific interest in birds first developed when I was at university and decided to tag along on a bird banding trip. To have the privilege of experiencing holding and learning about wild birds, enabled me to develop a true appreciation of the beauty, character and uniqueness of each species. Over ten years on, I still love being involved in bird banding projects and head to the bush several times a year to do just that.

I have done a wide variety of volunteer wildlife research work, which has lead me to many wonderful corners of the country, from the dunes of the Simpson Desert and tall forest of South Western WA to the tropical rainforest of Cape York and alpine plateaus of Tasmania. The volunteer work finally resulted in employment in the environmental industry, working as an environmental consultant and then as a biodiversity manager, before I was offered the Swift Parrot Recovery Program Coordinator job with the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (now NSW

Department of Environment and Conservation) in 2001. This was my dream job, combining my love of the bush and wildlife, and working with volunteers all over eastern Australia. Since it was seasonal work focusing on Swift Parrots during their winter migration, in between seasons I took the opportunity to do volunteer work in countries where they needed help to implement conservation and research projects. So over the next couple of years when the Swifties headed south to Tasmania, I headed north to Papua New Guinea and then over to Costa Rica. Working in these countries was incredibly rewarding in many ways but also highlighted how difficult it can be to simply get things done. These experiences have given me a greater appreciation of just how lucky we are here in Australia and how much each individual can contribute to conservation.

I have now been working on the Swift Parrot Recovery Program for four years, and I am half way through my PhD on this species. My fascination with Swift Parrots is unrelenting, the more I know, the more questions I find, and the more intriguing they are. Working on the recovery program with a variety of team members and volunteers from across eastern Australia has been incredibly rewarding and endlessly inspiring, and I look forward to continuing my involvement in Swift Parrot and woodland bird conservation in some form throughout my life.

THE SWIFT PARROT & REGENT HONEYEATER RECOVERY TEAMS

present



Threatened Woodland Bird Workshop 2005



including a welcome to country by Wiradjuri elders

Saturday 23rd July, Gundagai, NSW

10am-5pm

Interested in woodland birds and their habitats? Then come along to a free one day workshop at Gundagai to find out how to identify threatened woodland bird species and the habitats they use in your local area.

The workshop will include:

- An illustrated talk by woodland bird researchers, including threatened species recovery team members
- Information about the latest survey and research information from your local area
- Identification of threatened woodland birds and their habitats, including Regent Honeyeaters and Swift Parrots
- Information on how to get involved in conservation programs for threatened woodland bird species and their habitats, including the National Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater Surveys held twice a year (May and August).

There will also be plenty of opportunity to share your observations and thoughts on woodland birds with researchers and other locals.

We will have a short field trip in the afternoon searching for some of the threatened species discussed during the day. All you need to bring is pen, paper, binoculars (optional) and enthusiasm!

Interested in coming along? Then simply register your name by July 15th 2005 we look forward to seeing you there!

Registrations can be made by contacting
Debbie Saunders (Swift Parrot Recovery Team) on
1800 66 57 66 (freecall) or swiftparrots@yahoo.com.au



Swift Parrot preparing for migration back to Tasmania. Photo: G. Dabb

Volunteer Inspiration

The recovery team would like to thank all of the volunteers who have provided us with personal feedback, support and encouragement with our recovery team work. To know and understand how volunteers feel about the program, their involvement and our contributions is a great reward – it gives us the motivation and drive to continue to work together and make the recovery program an ongoing success.



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

Newsletter editor – Debbie Saunders.

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