

What drives higher foraging rates for endangered Glossy Black-Cockatoos on Kangaroo Island?

Abstract

The South Australian Glossy Black-Cockatoo subspecies has been restricted to Kangaroo Island since the mid-1900s, following extensive habitat clearance. A successful long term Recovery Program saw the population increase to around 370 individuals before around half of drooping sheoak feeding habitat for the population was burnt in the 2019-20 bushfires on Kangaroo Island. Observations suggest that it may be 10-15 years before regenerating sheoak develops cone crops of sufficient size to provide a useful food source for the cockatoos. This study looks at aspects of foraging habitat use by the cockatoos, aiming to detect any differences between fire affected regions on western Kangaroo Island and areas to the east that were not been impacted by the fires. Preliminary results and analyses indicate that birds in fire-affected flock regions may have adapted to reduced availability of foraging habitat by feeding on a higher proportion of trees. Other factors influencing foraging include habitat age and rainfall. Younger revegetation areas that were planted pre-fire are providing potentially high-quality habitat to support the cockatoos' recovery in burnt flock regions. Remnant sheoak habitat not burnt in the fires in these regions also provides important feeding habitat post-fire. These results provide evidence of the value of both revegetation and remnant areas for the recovery of an endangered bird after a catastrophic event.