

SCIENCE AND COMMUNITY PROVIDING HOMES FOR THE FORTY-SPOTTED PARDALOTE



The Forty-spotted Pardalote is one species helped by the work on North Bruny Island.



Great news! After three years of targeted monitoring activities we've found White gum seedlings on North Bruny Island that have survived the summer.

This exciting observation was among the data collected from a series of regeneration trials, set up in late 2011 at Murrayfield Station, a lamb and fine wool property at the northern end of Bruny, owned by the Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC).

The trials were set up in response to observations by Dr Sally Bryant from Tasmanian Land Conservancy back in 2010 that White gum (*Eucalyptus viminalis*) is in decline in the region, which could signify the end of the Forty-spotted Pardalote, whose survival depends on the tree. Hollows in old White gums provide nesting habitat and young trees provide food in the form of lerps and manna. Sally's study showed that in many areas on Bruny both young and old white gums are in short supply.

In an endeavour to restore this habitat NRM South teamed up with scientists and the community to launch a research partnership with The Understorey Network and Kingborough Council.

The team wanted to find some practical methods that farmers could use to promote White gum growth as an alternative to planting, which can be time consuming and expensive. A series of experiments using trial plots that were variously fenced, mildly burnt, 'scalped' (where the top layer of soil is removed) or treated with herbicide was set up.

NRM South's Dr Magali Wright talks about the outcomes. "While the numbers of established seedlings are not what we'd hoped for we have learned that fencing is crucial, and that both burning and scalping seem to offer great promise, with a couple of dozen seedlings going strong in those trial plots. It will take another two to three years before we'll have enough data to make solid conclusions."

The North Bruny community has embraced the plight of the White gum and the Forty-spotted Pardalote, and another champion has recently come on board. The weetaapona Aboriginal Corporation, the cultural advisory body to the ILC, is taking the lead role in addressing conservation and cultural heritage issues on Murrayfield Station.

At a workshop held this year on the island, members of weetaapona learned more about the bird and its habitat from Sally Bryant, Oliver Strutt from the Understorey Network, and Amanda Edworthy, a PhD student from ANU. There was lots of information sharing and some participants got their first sighting of the bird they have been working for years to protect.

Amanda has been spending her summers on Bruny using artificial nest boxes to encourage Forty-spotted Pardalotes back to their diminished habitat, with great success; the number of suitable tree hollows is currently so low that the nest boxes are proving to be a valuable addition to the landscape. Her work prompted weetaapona to apply for an NRM South Naturally Inspired Grant, and with the proceeds they began installing Amanda's nest boxes.

Also at the workshop we explored the application of the 'state in transition' model, developed by The Understorey Network, to help with planning for Forty-spotted Pardalote recovery. Using the model we began prioritising actions to restore habitat. Simply put, the model enables weetaapona to get the biggest bang for their buck through the identification of sites that have the most potential for the regeneration of habitat back to a useful status. This work had an added benefit in that the method for prioritisation was extended beyond Murrayfield to support restoration decision making for the North Bruny Biodiversity Fund Project.

The partners in these recovery actions are the Understorey Network, Kingborough Council, weetaapona Aboriginal Corporation, Indigenous Land Corporation, Tasmanian Land Conservancy, and a host of volunteers to whom we are eternally grateful. The White gum regeneration trials are one part of a wider conservation picture that will inform a Land and Sea Country Plan for Murrayfield Station, that weetaapona will develop with the assistance of NRM South and other project partners in the coming year.