



Welcome to the Friends of the Western Ground Parrot Newsletter

No. 91 – Spring 2021

STOP PRESS: Bird of the Year voting is now open!

This year's vote is by knock-out, so please make sure you vote for the Ground Parrot each day to keep us in the running to win (<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/ng-interactive/2021/sep/27/australian-bird-of-the-year-2021-vote-now-for-your-favourite>)

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- Our Art Auction is coming!!
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Autonomous recording Unit in Cape Arid National Park
(Photo: Sarah Comer, DBCA)

Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) Parks and Wildlife Service

AN UPDATE ON THE FIRST EVER WILD TO WILD TRANSLOCATION OF WESTERN GROUND PARROTS!

Sarah Comer, Stewart Ford, Abby Thomas, Abby Berryman, Helena Stokes,
Mark Blythman and Allan Burbidge

Winter is normally a quieter time for the project team, but this winter has been busier than previous years, following the first ever wild to wild translocation of western ground parrots (WGPs). In late April five male and two female WGPs were fitted with radio transmitters and released in an area east of Albany. Intensive ground tracking of the released birds was carried out over the two weeks after release to gain insights into survival and movements of the birds in their new homes. Following the initial intensive post-release monitoring, the locations of the birds were checked every week or two for the four-month life of the transmitters.

The transmitter of one bird, a male, was retrieved a few days after his release, in thick vegetation where it had come off. A second bird, a female, has remained relatively close to the release site for several months, although she has explored the area with local movements of several kilometres on a few occasions before returning to her 'usual' location. The remaining five birds initially dispersed much more widely than was anticipated, with the furthest reaching heathlands approximately 50 km from the release area. These birds could only be tracked from the air by helicopter or plane because of the large distances required to be searched and the difficulty of picking up signals from the ground. In addition to ground-based telemetry, aerial telemetry was used to monitor the location of the birds approximately every fortnight, weather permitting. After the wide-ranging initial explorations of some birds, they had all returned to an area within 10-20km of the release site two months following release, where they have remained while still showing signs of local movement.

The transmitters fitted to most of the WGPs have now lost their signal as the batteries powering them have expired, and so the WGP team's focus is shifting to monitoring of the released birds using autonomous recording units (ARUs). Up to 50 ARUs, supported by the BirdLife WA project, have been set up in a grid across areas of prospective habitat in and around the release location with the objective of recording their calls - another requirement of the short-term success criteria of the translocation plan.



Mark Blythman radio-tracking one of the collared kylloring. High points in the landscape are invaluable for detecting radio signals over wide areas (Photo Stewart Ford, DBCA).

In terms of meeting the short-term success criteria for the translocation, the project team have been encouraged by the survival and persistence of birds since April. Over the next few months we will be analysing the ARU recordings from the release area, and also conducting some listening surveys. We hope that we will detect the first calls of these translocated birds in their new home.

While the translocation site has been a major focus of the past three months, the wild population in Cape Arid and Nuytsland is also on our minds. Processing of the solar and autumn ARU grid data up to Autumn 2021 has been completed and monitoring of both pre- and post-capture calling rates and occupancy showed no significant declining trends. Seasonal estimates of occupancy from data collected from the solar grid (based on Nyungar season) found lower estimated probabilities of occupancy in Djilba (Aug-Sept) and Kambarang (Oct-Nov), which coincides with the period when birds are likely to be nesting, and perhaps therefore concentrated in key breeding areas. Importantly, there were no significant changes in these important periods between 2019 and 2020. The solar ARU network will be surveyed again in October, while the team are continuing to target feral cats around core occupied habitat.

There has been a significant amount of media relating to the ground parrot translocation and work carried out this year. More information can be found in the Landline story (available at <https://www.abc.net.au/landline/parrots-in-peril:-saving-western-ground-parrot/13386470>), or articles in DBCA's Landscape magazine (<https://www.dpaw.wa.gov.au/plants-and-animals/threatened-species-and-communities/threatened-animals/western-ground-parrot - scroll to the bottom of the page>) and WA Bird Notes (<https://western-ground-parrot.org.au/2021/09/29/western-ground-parrot-featured-in-birdlife-wa-bird-notes/>).

The achievements of this year, both translocation and protection of birds in the wild, would not have been possible without the support of the Friends, BirdLife, the South Coast Threatened Birds Recovery Team, volunteers and funding partners. Many thanks to everyone who has contributed.

Western Ground Parrot Update from Perth Zoo

The Western Ground Parrot project upgrade works funded by the Zoo and Aquarium Association Australasia Wildlife Conservation Fund have now been completed.

The new transportable building was delivered and installed on site (fig. 1) and staff have set up incubation (fig. 2) and emergency care equipment in preparation for the breeding season. It is very exciting to have the much-needed dedicated facilities for the Western Ground Parrots. This provides significant increased capacity to support assisted egg incubation and hand-raising should it be needed as well as provide dedicated emergency care facilities for the birds.

The new WGP aviary has been completed and male Brutus was transferred into the facility in July (fig. 3, 4, 5). He has settled into the new aviary very well (fig. 6).

This year we opened up the new hatches in the main aviary complex to provide birds with access to each other for the purpose of providing mate choice. In July we watched as male Joy approached female Leuca and mate feeding commenced between these birds (fig. 7). Very interestingly, we also observed male Monak interacting with male Joy. The behaviours identified were not typical aggressive behaviours that might be expected between rival male parrots. There was no chasing or defensive behaviours observed. Instead, we watched as the males exhibited audible wing clap display flights, bobbing displays, wing flicks, tail flaring and standing facing each other with beaks often touching. The males were also comfortable feeding together at the same feed station and were often more comfortable around each other than they were around the females. This behaviour was most prominent early mornings and late evenings. The behaviours progressed and male Joy was observed allofeeding male Monak (fig. 8) and male Monak has been observed regurgitating food onto a small twig in front of male Joy and then male Joy observed eating the regurgitated food off the twig. At the same time male Joy and female Leuca's pair bond continued to progress and they were observed mating in August (fig. 9). Male Monak has shown some interest towards Leuca at times but so far, there has been no mate feeding observed between these two birds. At the time of writing, Joy and Leuca have been observed mating a total of at least 18 times.

To our surprise male Mingko was observed entering into male Zephyr's aviary in August and socialising with Zephyr. Zephyr strutted up to Mingko with tail fanned and wings held partly ajar. He then went through the motions of mate feeding Mingko but no food was passed (fig. 10). Mingko maintained a tall stance with Zephyr but didn't show behaviour typical of giving or receiving food. This behaviour has now been observed on two occasions between these males. We are not sure what to make of the behaviour between the males at this stage, however it could indicate that there may be a level of cooperative breeding that this species exhibits. We will continue to watch and learn as much as we can about the behaviours of these unique birds.

In August we watched as male Zephyr approached and allo fed female Kopin (fig. 11). At the time of writing there has been no further progress with this pair. Female Kangal has been spending increased time in male Jinnung's area and the two birds often feed in close proximity.

We are pleased to see the progression with the birds so far this season and we are hoping they will continue to progress to nesting.



Figure 1. The new portable building thanks to the Zoo and Aquarium Association Australasia Wildlife Conservation Fund.



Figure 2. Technical Officer Kerry Pickles checking incubator performance inside the new portable.



Figure 3. The new WGP aviary thanks to the Zoo and Aquarium Association Australasia Wildlife Conservation Fund.



Figure 4. New WGP holding aviary keeper service area July 2021



Figure 5. New aviary habitat for male Brutus July 2021



Figure 6. Male Brutus settling well on day of transfer into the new WGP aviary July 2021



Figure 7. Male Joy allofeeding female Leuca August 2021



Figure 8. Male Joy and male Monak interacting (Monak left, Joy right) August 2021



Figure 9. Male Joy mates with female Leuca August 2021



Chirpings from the Chair

Paul Wetton

Annual General Meeting

Our AGM will be held at 4:30pm on 9 November 2021 at the DBCA office in Albany. A notice will be sent out soon. Participation will also be available via video conferencing which was used quite successfully last year, including with an overseas member!

Please consider nominating for the Committee - it's an exciting time to be involved!!

Other News

We are entering another period of high expectation for the future conservation of kyloring. The Zoo report is indicating some very positive, if not intriguing, behaviour by the birds. Hopefully by the time of the next newsletter in December there will be, long anticipated, news about successful breeding.

The report from Parks and Wildlife advises on how the translocated birds have fared since their release. I strongly recommend you access the articles listed in their report to give you a much more complete picture of the whole process. I trust you can all appreciate the challenges faced to-date, the huge effort to achieve the outcomes, even if not entirely what we might have hoped for in terms of where the translocated birds initially settled and the adverse impacts on 2 of the captured birds (see the publications in the DBCA report). As a member of the Recovery Team, I can assure you there will be a comprehensive review of these events and outcomes. The ongoing focus on, and work by DBCA for the source population is particularly important.

The Recovery Plan is a continuous improvement program!!

Finances

The Friend's financial position and ability to further contribute to aspects of the Recovery Plan remains in a solid position. As will be reported at the AGM (and has been in previous newsletters), at the end of the 20/21 financial year we spent nearly \$55,000 in grants and donations supporting the plan. We currently have over \$60,000 available, of which some \$3,400 is committed from the 20/21 WIRES/Landcare Australia grant to be used in coming months for the retrieval of ARUs/data cards from Fitzgerald River National Park or Cape Arid National Park.

Nevertheless, we will continue to seek further funds (e.g. the Art Auction) as there will continue to be critical activities and/or needs not funded by government. Importantly, it remains a major concern that on three occasions over the past year the Threatened Species Commissioner has not replied to letters from me seeking information about ongoing funding commitments to the Recovery Plan. While significant (and appreciated) funds were provided for this year's translocation, it is my understanding that no commitment has been made for funds beyond this calendar year.

Awareness Raising

To continue our awareness raising activities, we have committed around \$10,000 to Riggs Australia to produce video material over the next 6 or so months about some of the translocation events.

Jennene Riggs filmed many aspects of the translocation and she will produce a number of short videos (“vignettes”) which will be used on social media and other relevant sources or at events. We will also be funding an episode on the parrots as part of the *Rewilding the West* series (<https://www.riggsaustralia.com/rewildingthewest>) featuring the actor and passionate conservation volunteer George Shevtsov. This series should be available after April next year.

Australian Wildlife Society (AWS) and Webinar

AWS have been a great supporter of the Friends, with their \$15,000 grant from the Kinder Project used to purchase 25 predator camera traps, still in place in the translocation area. Also, AWS has nominated ground parrots as their *Wildlife of the Year* (see https://www.aws.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/AWS_Ground_Parrots.pdf).

On 3 October, AWS are hosting a Webinar for Australian Wildlife Week (<https://www.aws.org.au/australian-wildlife-week-2021/>) and they have invited me to give a keynote presentation on kyloring. Please consider participating, and if in WA, please note the starting time.

Art Auction

As flagged in the last newsletter, we are getting closer to auctioning the art items that have been donated to us over the years. This should happen in the next month or two and all members will receive a notification. All the items will make great Christmas presents! The photo below is for another terrific item donated recently.

Citizen Science opportunity

DBCA are in the process of organising an opportunity for community input to the Recovery Plan via Zooniverse (<https://www.zooniverse.org/>) for analysis of the many photos coming off the predator camera traps in the translocation area. Once the arrangements have been finalised you will be notified, so I hope some of you at least will be able to take part.



Antony Taggart and me with a framed print of a watercolour of the ground parrot (*Pezoporus wallicus*) dated 1791. Attributed to Thomas Watling. Donated by Antony and Zoo Peru (<http://www.zooperu.com/>)

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Please donate

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