

Brush-tailed Phascogale Project Update

December 2016



Nest boxes

Apologies for the lack of project updates during the year but the Friends of Brisbane Ranges and [Wyndham Central College](#) have been busy, as well as getting sidetracked by a few things during the year. The school was progressing nicely in getting the nest boxes planned and cut out when the Education Department turned up at short notice and announced an audit of school procedures and policies. Drop everything for a while (month or two) until all the fallout from the audit is dealt with and we get back on track.

The marine ply boxes proved straightforward but the PVC panel has caused some issues due to OH&S concerns with the dust while cutting. This was sorted out for this batch of boxes but the school may not be willing to use PVC panel in the future, so we might make those boxes ourselves.



Photos: Allan Bernardi

The students put in an impressive effort to get as many boxes completed before school finished for the year, with many attending during their lunch break. Students from Years 9 and 11 and [Hands on Learning](#) students attended 48 sessions. Overall, the students contributed over 520 hours of volunteer work (and the teacher Allan Bernardi over 50 hours). They also found the time to attend the 2016 [Kids Teaching Kids](#) conference. As well as the students making the boxes, many other classes walked through during the construction sessions, with many questions raised and answered providing a wonderful opportunity for raising awareness.

Many of the students involved provided feedback on their involvement in the project and these comments are attached at the end of this update.

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Putting them up

During the year we investigated sites within the park suitable for installing nest boxes. We restricted ourselves to EVCs preferred by the Brush-tailed Phascogale (Grassy or Heathy Dry Forest) and looked for sites that had either been long unburnt or had been recently burnt. We identified several sites which met our requirements and settled on a site near Sheep Track (long unburnt) and one near Island Track (burnt in 2013). The idea is to investigate whether installing nest boxes in unburnt sites with an abundance of hollows is worthwhile and whether installing nest boxes in recently burnt areas encourages the return of threatened fauna.

In November we organised a nest box installation day with the Park rangers (who turned out in force).



Photo: Vicky Grosser

With a few FoBR members scouting ahead for suitable trees we installed 23 nest boxes across the two sites, as well as installing motion sensitive cameras on nine of the nest boxes. These will be used to monitor activity around the nest box entrance, providing data on who might be visiting the nest box sporadically. This will complement the information from the nest box inspection camera which will record what species is resident in the box on a particular day.

The remainder of the boxes will be installed early in 2017.



Photo: Colin Cook

Sideline

I was invited to become a member of The Woodland Ecosystems Resilience Partnership Program (WERPP), which is responsible for coordinating the implementation of the Brush-tailed Phascogale FFG Act Action Statement.

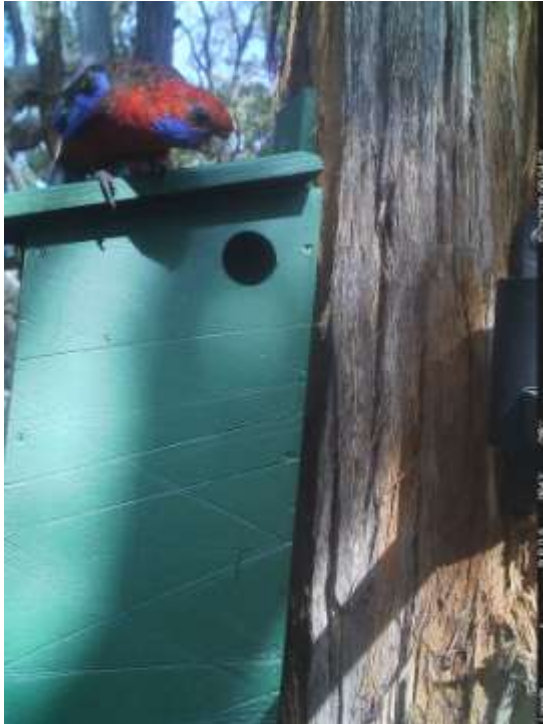
I have also had discussions with the Zoos Victoria Community Conservation Project Coordinator, to discuss the "[Love Your Locals](#)" campaign and how the principles could be applied to publicity around the Brush-tailed Phascogale.

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Monitoring

We inspected some of the nest boxes near Sheep Track recently, mainly to get some idea of how the cameras were lasting and what sort of activity might be happening. None of the nest boxes were occupied, but it has only been just over a month. The cameras were operating fine with plenty of battery life left, although some had been triggered by moving branches a lot so a bit of realignment was carried out. While the boxes haven't been occupied yet, there is certainly some inspection going on by the local fauna.

Crimson Rosella



Sugar Glider



White-throated Treecreeper



White-throated Treecreeper

Brush-tailed Phascogale Project Update

A new team member

In June this year, an NRM officer from Moorabool Shire spotted an interesting carcass on the side of the Western Freeway near Myrniong. He retrieved the carcass and stored it in the freezer. Given that the animal was in good condition (despite being hit by a vehicle), we took the opportunity to get the carcass taxidermied for use in talks and educational sessions. A DNA sample was also taken for a DELWP study that is nearing conclusion (results soon we hope).



Before



After

What's next?

More nest boxes will be installed in 2017. Wyndham Central College will also construct some more nest boxes as part of their environmental studies program during 2017, as well as helping with the installation.

Monitoring of nest boxes will continue on a regular basis, using motion sensitive cameras and the nest box inspection camera.

We (and our fine taxidermied new member) will be at the [Ballan Autumn Festival](#) and the [Ecolink Sustainability Expo](#) in March 2017, helping with displays and information on Moorabool Shire fauna with the Moorabool Landcare Network.

We'll continue collaborating with [CeRDI](#) to get more information up on the SWIFFT [Phascogale Team page](#), as well as working on a database to record nest box monitoring data, linked with a field recording app of some sort. Several other community groups have expressed interest in this, so we will work with them to ensure anything developed is suitable for a wide range of users.

Colin Cook

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Wyndham Central College

Students comments on the nest box project

The nest boxes were constructed with three classes at Wyndham Central. These were Year 11 VCAL, Year 9 Advance Program, and Hands On Learning.

The nest boxes was a good experience for me as I learned to use tools I wouldn't usually use, for example the cordless drill and the sander. I liked how we learned about the Brush-tailed Phascogale and how it would live in these boxes. We had to cut the wood, put it together, paint it, and then finally get them to the Brisbane ranges. I am very happy that we are helping out this little cute animal. I would like to say thanks Mr Bernardi for teaching me and helping me to learn about the animal and the tools. I think the next year Star students should do this next year. – Chloe

The nest boxes were an amazing thing to be a part of, making the nest boxes for Brush-tailed Phascogale was a good experience. I learned how to screw and drill into the wood. This was a really useful skill to know. – Xoxo Leejana

I sanded, glued and screwed some of the nest boxes. I enjoyed making them and providing a safe place for the possum. It was an opportunity for us to not only learn to use the tools but also learn about the person. –Abby

The nest boxes are a fantastic idea and support to the Brisbane ranges and animals. They were fun to make and it feels good to know we have made an impact on the environment. –Emily

I helped make the nest boxes and I am really amazed with the things we as a community can do to help the environment and increase Australian native wildlife populations. I believe nest boxes will help the environment greatly and I think they will impact our bushland positively as well as teaching the young generation to have more appreciation for our wildlife and environment. -Lauren

Making the nest boxes was fun this will really help the animal not become endangered or extinct. I was painting the over in hands on learning, they were a dark green. I helped paint them with Ebony Fraser and I'm happy more animals would get homes and be out of the weather. –Ebony Sutton

The nest boxes allow us to understand how we can help the environment and the possums that live in it. It provides homes for the possums that may not be able to find one. We can help the possums by providing them a safe home in which they can live and reproduce in. it will help the population increase, it will help them survive in the wild. – Liam

It was fun helping out with the nest boxes because it is giving the possum a home so they can feel safe. –say po

It was fun helping out to make the nest boxes. Making them would help the possums stay safe. I learnt how nest boxes are made. –Prisilar

The nest box is good to make for possums to live in. it also will help keep them safe and make sure they have a home. –Htee Sei

It was amazing to be a part of something that benefited our environment and our animals such as the Brush-tailed Phascogale. During the construction of the nest boxes I learnt great life skills such as using the electric drill. Before the nest boxes I did not know anything about the Brush-tailed Phascogale but now I know a lot about them. Thanks Bernardi for the great experience. –Kiana

I painted and put together the nest boxes, I learned how to glue, mark the places for screws and sand all the nest boxes down. – Tahlia

The nest boxes are very helpful to our environment because they help and give them a safe place to stay. –Ebony Harding