

The Powerful Owl Project

November 2012

2012 Season Summary

A huge thank you goes out to all those who have been involved in the project, from the invaluable volunteer owl observers, to people sending in casual observations and land managers helping us out with data, administration and site access. Without all of you the project would not be nearly what it is.

Data has been collected from 84 sites across Sydney, Central Coast and Newcastle by 69 volunteers. Seven of these sites have been removed from further analysis as they are on the urban fringe and don't constitute purely urban Powerful Owls, the focus of this project.

Eighteen successful breeding territories have been confirmed this year, three more than last year. Only one of these was outside of Sydney. Of these, 12 nest trees were identified. A further four nests were found although the breeding attempt failed. Another 23 territories were identified with owls regularly, although no breeding evidence was recorded.

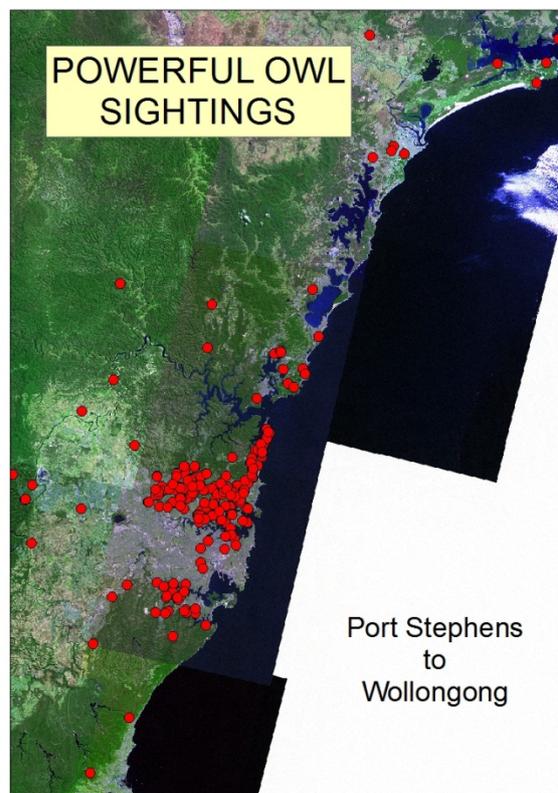
It seems we are getting closer to a good estimate of the number of Powerful Owls within the Sydney area and surrounding urban centres. In Sydney there seems to be approximately 43 territories within the urban area. This is in keeping with estimates from last year's results from the pilot study combined with results from Kavanagh (2004).

Noting that this year we have removed territories on the urban boundaries, it is possible that there is in excess of 50 territories in the greater Sydney region.



Courting pair of Powerful Owls, by Ákos Lumnitzer

A great help in understanding the distribution of owls from within the study area comes from the observations sent in from the general public and birding clubs. This season we have had over 280 records submitted allowing us to really fine tune the likely breeding territories. The map of these observations below shows just how often they are being sighted throughout the Sydney Basin.



Interesting Observations

Prey that has been observed in the clutches of Powerful Owl talons this year includes the usual suspects. Ringtail Possums have been the prey of choice along with a higher proportion of Brushtail Possums than expected. Grey-headed Flying-foxes have also featured quite prominently along with Sulphur-crested Cockatoos and Rainbow Lorikeets.

A number of Cockatoo interactions have been noted around the hollows, the most notable of which was a Cockatoo which flew into an occupied hollow, closely followed by an owl. The resulting racket ended in a quite bald Cockatoo being chased from the hollow – a lucky escape and an amazing observation.

Numerous other great observations have been made. Two of note included one lucky owl observer watching at dusk as an adult flew down to the nearby creek for a bath, whilst another saw an owl finishing off a Sugar Glider on the ground in a picnic area.

Multiple owls continue to be found in some locations, one site in-particular having up to four owls in a short one kilometre section of creek line. High-density urban living for Powerful Owls!

A number of hazard reduction burns have taken place across Sydney during the breeding season, which has been a concern. One example where consultation with land managers was undertaken, resulted in an altered burn plan and the owls being monitored during the burn. The fledglings continued to be fed by a parent during the operation right on the edge of the burn area about 20m from a tanker with flashing lights and pumps going, very adaptive these urbanised owls!! Unfortunately it seems the whole family has since left the area, likely in search of better hunting grounds. Will be interesting to see if they return next breeding season.

Another major threat to the owls within the urban area is car strikes. From data supplied by WIRES, Taronga Zoo and AWCN (more data also coming from Sydney Wildlife), there has been 10 fatal car strikes to adult Powerful Owls in the northern suburbs and northern beaches area since March 2012. Not a great statistic and a management issue that will be getting some attention.



Powerful Owl fledglings, by Kristen Hardy

The Future

The project is continuing now into a data analysis phase along with beginning to develop some tools and resources for education and management of the

species in the urban area. Look out for our up-coming short movie featuring the Powerful Owl.

The monitoring of the breeding season will happen again next year from late March to October and we should be able to be a little more strategic and targeted based on the good work achieved this season.

We will be contacting all past volunteers next year to see if they will want to take part again.

What's Coming Up

To keep the interest up in the project, develop some skills and to help us understand more about these urban Powerful Owls, we will be running a pellet analysis workshop. The workshop will introduce people to the techniques involved and analyse this year's collection of pellets to feed important information directly back into the project.

The workshop will be held on the 23rd February 2013 at the BirdLife Discovery Centre at Sydney Olympic Park, please keep an eye on the calendar at <http://www.birdlife.org.au/visit-us/discovery-centre> for more details and how to register.



Powerful Owl pellet, by Kristen Hardy

Thanks again to everyone who has taken part in this seasons monitoring or has contributed in some way to the project. Your time and efforts are what allow us to continue this valuable work.

Cheers
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