



Revegetation on Farms – A Bird’s Eye View

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Does revegetation on farms provide habitat for native birds? To help answer this GA teamed up with the Canberra Ornithologists Group (COG) and CSIRO in 2000 to undertake the *Birdwatch* project. Thanks to an enormous effort by volunteers, nearly 400 surveys were undertaken on 133 sites in a region extending from Boorowa to Braidwood.

The *Birdwatch* project surveyed sites established by both direct seeding and tubestock and ranging in age from 14 months to 14 years. Seasonal surveys over one year revealed a total of 110 different bird species using the revegetation sites. The most common were small insectivorous birds such as the Superb Fairy-wren, Grey Fantail, Silvereeye and up to 5 different species of Thornbill. Particularly exciting was the recording of 15 species of declining woodland birds such as the Speckled Warbler, Red-capped Robin, Diamond Firetail and Southern Whiteface.

Analysis of the vegetation at the sites found that more bird species were recorded in the older revegetated sites and those that were larger, block-shaped rather than linear and had greater structural variation in the height and density of the trees, shrubs and ground layer. A 2003 study recorded more than 40 bird species breeding in the revegetated sites, 18 of these were woodland birds, including four declining and two threatened species.

In a typical Whole of Paddock Rehabilitation site we would expect to find between 20-30 different species of birds at any one time. Many of these birds are small insectivorous species which perform important pest control services around the farm. Healthy bird communities remove half to two-thirds of leaf-eating insects within tree patches, thereby keeping vital vegetation growing on farms.

Surveys in all 133 Birdwatch sites are ongoing and the information collected over the last 13 years forms an incredible record of the immense value of revegetation on farms to birds in the wider ACT region. By tracking the changes in the bird community as the vegetation structure changes over the years, the ‘tall shrub’ layer between 4 and 8 metres in height has been identified as the major influence on increasing the number of bird species in revegetation.

The survey results led to the production of *Bringing Birds Back – A Glovebox Guide* for bird Identification and Habitat Restoration. The booklet features photos and descriptions of the 30 most common birds, 20 species to watch out for, and tips and techniques for revegetating to maximise habitat for birds. Copies are available from Greening Australia in Canberra or on the Greening Australia website

<http://www.greeningaustralia.org.au/index.php?nodeId=57>