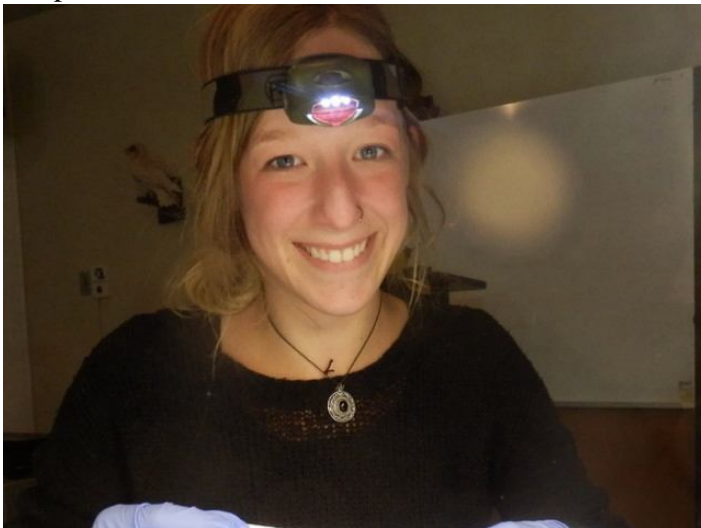


## Bat box check: Organ Pipes: August 2014

We had a perfect pseudo-spring day for batting, mild and calm. Stephen had just had an operation on his right hand, so Pia substituted as chief ladder-climber, and we both had a substantial entourage of scribes, bat carriers and ladder carriers. We also had an interstate visitor in Wendy Neilan, from ANU who is about to get into a post-grad project on bats in the Brindabella mountains west of Canberra and needs some bat-handling experience, shifting sideways from bird projects. And enjoyed a tourist view of the famous Organ Pipes.



Stephen brought Lesley-Ann Johnston, an honours genetics student, who is to collect and analyse the fur samples from multitudes of Gould's Wattled bats.



About halfway, Stephen took all the bats as Lindy had arrived and was hoping to get started on processing in the Visitor Centre. With Stephen's hand out of action and the slowness of fur-plucking, all possible head-start time was needed.

We had found one big group of Gould's in box 37, nearly all females, and another bunch of Gould's along with five Freetails in box 13, about half-and-half of both sexes



Females and a few males in box 37



Gould's and Freetails fraternizing in box 13

We peeped into a horizontal hollow log on the way to box 29 and found a snoozing ringtail curled up inside



Tried to find some gliders for a show-and-tell, but only found empty nests and one box propped open with a stick that was occupied by an opportunistic and very anxious Ringtail





We had 202 bats in August 2013, but only a quarter as many this year, which has been very dry, unlike last winter, which was exceptionally wet. So there was not a great rush in the visitor centre.

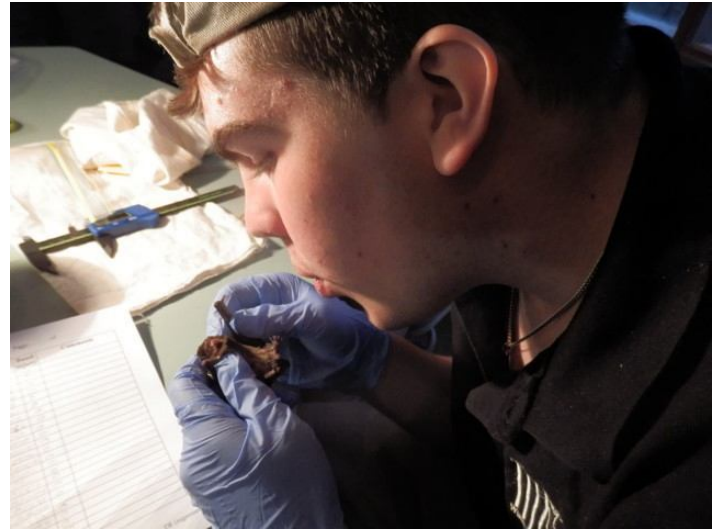


Pia had been a fellow student with Wendy at ANU and helped her get started on acquiring bat handling skill.



And we had several animal carers and rescuers as well as undergraduates come along to help. Here is Connor practising nipple-blowing, well into a career as bat

handler



And Bryony, almost sole animal rescuer for the western suburbs



And Amanda



As there were only 59 bats to examine, it was all over just after dark, before 7 p.m., and almost everyone was keen to help release bats from their bags, so we had the usual line up near the Pipes and the usual long wait for Freetails to make up their minds to fly off.



We had three species for the night, mainly Gould's as always, with 2.25 females per male, about usual for this time of year

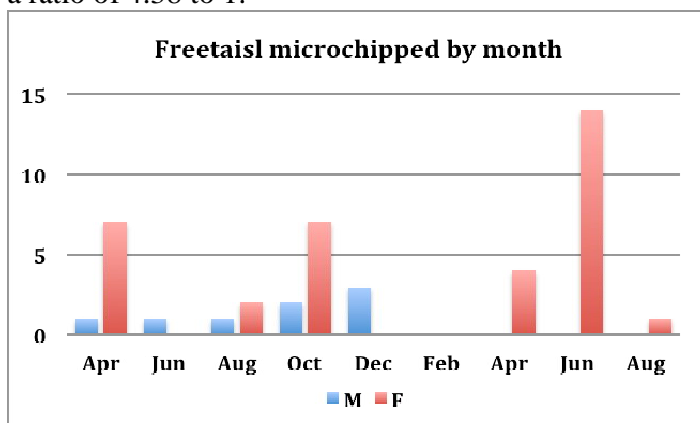
Box	Bat	Species	Adult	
			M	F
C37	24	Gould's	5	19
C28	10	Gould's	5	5
C13	9	Gould's	5	4
	5	Freetail	1	4
C30	6	Gould's		6
C38	3	Gould's	1	2
C19	2	Lge Forest	2	
	<b>59</b>	<b>Totals</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>40</b>

This result returns us to the level of box usage in 2010 for Gould's.

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Gould's	43	113	101	196	52
Lge Forest	6	3		2	2
Freetail		3	1	3	5
Chocolate				1	
<b>Total</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>59</b>

### Freetails

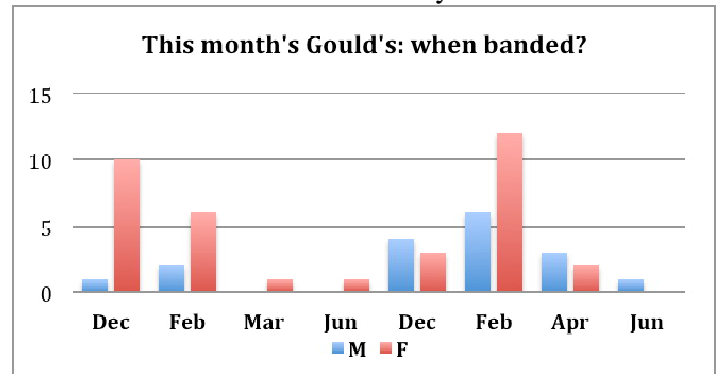
Stephen started micro-chipping Freetails in April 2013 and has now done 43 of them, 8 males and 35 females, a ratio of 4.38 to 1.



All the males were chipped last year, and this year there has been a fairly big influx of new females. The five bats captured this month include one new female, 2 females done in June, one male of unknown origin and one female from the first month of chipping, in April 2013. She seems to treat the boxes as home, as she has now been caught 4 times.

### Gould's

52 Gould's were captured this month. 11 of them were banded in Dec 2012, when we first started, 10 females and one male. As we have been finding for years, Gould's form a matriarchal society.



It will be interesting to see what Lesley-Ann learns about the relationship between the young bats and the one male who has now been around for almost 2 years. Are they all his children? 8 of the bats were banded in Feb 2013, 6 females and 2 males, so again these males have hung around for 18 months and seem to be becoming part of the core group. Most of the others were banded from Dec '13 to Jun '14, and are probably the young for this year. There was a double breeding, so quite a few may have been too small and young to emigrate before winter set in, and may leave in spring or even next autumn. None of the really old bats were present this time, so either they have all died, or the last few are roosting elsewhere and may return in October.

### Large Forest bats

There were only two of this species, both of them males, one banded in Jun '13 and one in Jun '14. So one of them seems to see our boxes as home and return repeatedly – this is his third capture record.

### Bat box monitoring

The first ten boxes were set up in April 1992, and bats were found in them when Laila Sadler, then monitoring the sugar glider boxes, told us she had found bats in glider boxes and gliders in bat boxes, so we visited the boxes for the first time in several months and there they were. Here is the first report, from the December '94 Friends newsletter:

*In April 1992 (see Newsletter 42), following a trapping of bats by Lindy Lumsden of Arthur Rylah Institute, we installed ten bat boxes that Kevin Jones had put togeth-*

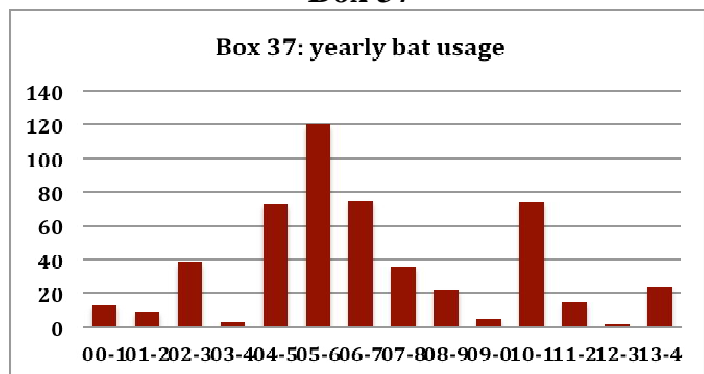


er, on eucalypts scattered between the Pipes and the ford. The boxes were smeared with bat droppings in the hope that the familiar smell would attract bats to use the boxes. Inspections in November '92 and July '94 showed not even one bat seemed to have used the boxes. Robert found some American research, which suggests that roost boxes not used within two years will never be used. So he decided we should move the boxes to new locations and maybe remove the bottom shelf so Sugar Gliders would not be able to use the boxes in competition with the bats, and took a nail bag and a hammer to do the work. Meanwhile he wrote a paper for the Bird Observer, telling the sad tale of our unsuccessful bat-box project.

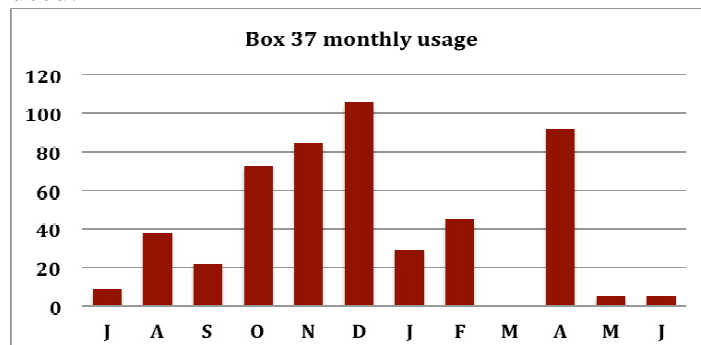
We found box C1, which had two Sugar Gliders inside, with a nest of eucalypt leaves. Both gliders had green ear tags. The next box had bat droppings, suggesting that the paper on the project's failure might be premature. The next box contained two bats the next had ten, the next had 13, and so it went on. Of the ten boxes, 6 had bats inside (nearly all flew off as we noisily clattered our ladder against the trees so we could climb up to inspect the boxes), two had Gliders inside, and another had leaves from a Glider nest. Altogether we found 34 bats, most of them seemed to be Gould's Wattled Bat (*Chalinolobus gouldii*). So, the day we were to call the project a failure, we discover the bat-box project is actually a great success, and instead of relocating the boxes, we left them all just where they were, and decided what is needed is at least another 10 boxes, of much the same design.

So, in 1994 we were very naïve and ignorant of what was involved in managing bat roost boxes, but we have learned a fair bit since then. The number of bats we capture in a year has grown enormously – 74 in the year to June '95, and 1,743 in 2007-8, the last year in which we checked the boxes monthly. This month's box check was number 199, so the October one will be 200. Something to celebrate – perhaps the longest-running bat project in Australia.

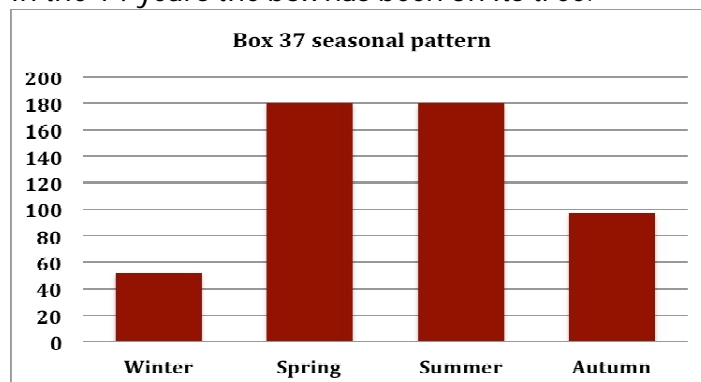
### Box 37



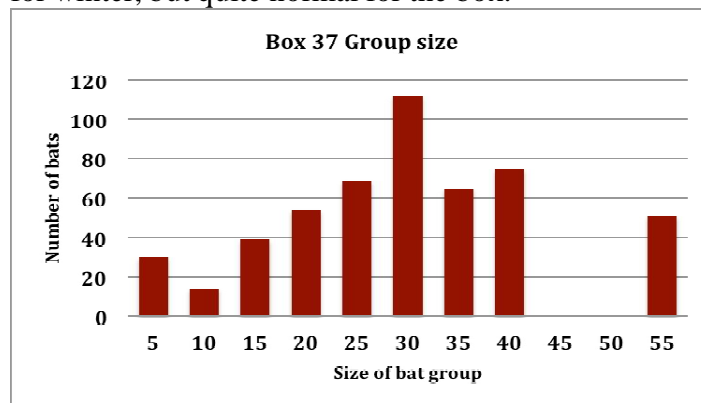
As you can see from the chart it was set up in 2000, was most intensively used in 2005-6, had a bit of a revival in 2010-1 but for most of the past decade has been little used.



It was intended as a winter box, but the history of bat usage shows it is mainly used in the breeding season and in April and hardly at all in winter. In fact the 24 bats this month was the biggest winter usage in the 14 years the box has been on its tree.



Very few of the bats have been in really small groups and it seems to attract a lot of quite big groups. 60% of the bats found in this box have been in groups of more than 25 bats. So this month's big group of 24 is unusual for winter, but quite normal for the box.



People who came to help this month were: Rev Attman, Bryony Retter, Amanda LoCascio, Michael Gooch, Louise Nicholas, Wendy Neilan, Taylor Hooker, Callum Luke, Michael Bajer, Connor van Doorn, Pia Lentini, Mary Long, Lindy Lumsden, Lesley-Ann Johnston, Stephen Griffiths, Robert Irvine and me.

**Next box check: Sunday 26 October 2 p.m.**