

Bat box check: 13 October 2015

In August, Steve took down several boxes attached to dead trees, all in need of repair. He has found a plastic board not vulnerable to rot like the timber box lids, and replaced the lids with this new material. On 2 October we went out to the park and reattached 8 of them to live trees close to the dead ones. The ridge slope and the flat are densely covered with felled skeletons of dead Red-gums, so the woodland has thinned out a lot.



The repaired boxes also now have numbered plastic tags identifying the box number, and cylindrical spacers between box and tree enabling the sock to be used, which will extract the bats en masse instead of one at a time, reducing the stress on the bats as well as the time taken to collect them all.



To finish up, Steve decided to remove the new box 44 from its dead tree, and found a group of 8 Gould's inside, captured with the sock. Several females and males, including the very old bat 88866, banded over a decade ago by Natasha, still looking feisty and healthy. The bats were all popped back into box 21, as Steve took box 44 home to modify it.



88866 was last seen in April, so it is nice to know she is still around, despite her very advanced age. She has probably borne 20 pups by now.



Two of the boxes with new plastic board lids are C6 and C7, installed in April 1992, still with their timber in very good condition. Oregon was good quality timber back then. If boxes can be made to last a quarter century, needing replacement only 4 times a century, that is good value for a \$70 box, a mere \$3 per year, plus a little extra for repair costs.

On 13 Oct. a big team gathered to follow the ladders about and process little bats. Steve and I had two groups follow us about and took about 2 hours to empty all the boxes. Some boxes just had bat fly pupae – little black specks attached to the side walls, two had sugar glider nests and one had a glider in the nest, a bit startled when the lid was raised. Pia arrived to collect the first hanger of bats to get a team started on bat assessing in the Visitor Centre.

Steve, Pia, Mary, Casey Visintin, Anita Torrance, Jessica Taylor, Melissa Walker, Tanya Loos, Doug Hoather, Treycee Baker, Laura Harbridge, Andy Gregg,

Rachel Lee, Anthea Gurr, Angela Walsh, Paul Bertuch, Nick Swinten, Matt West, Stuart Bell, Helen Reilly.



Sugar glider in box 9:



The team turned out to be the biggest we've ever had



Paul Bertuch had brought four of his TAFE students for their first experience of bats, as part of their work experience: Nick, Matt, Michael and Stuart. They followed Steve and helped with the ladder.



There was a cluster of sawfly larvae (Spitfires) on one tree https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spitfire_sawfly



Box 42 had a very big group of Gould's and a Freetail. In fact the day was dominated by big maternity groups of pregnant female bats



Most of the new recruits wandered up to the VC to be part of the busy scene there, but Michael stayed to help Steve.



There were 23 people in the VC so the table stretched right across the large room



Steve was very busy taking genetic samples, banding a few new bats, and medicating a small number of banding injuries, moving bands to the other wing, with Pia and Casey also banding. The recent batch of small bands for Forest bats was causing problems



Paul's students did a lot of scribing and Nick, who has been vaccinated, did some bat assessing. They didn't

stay to release the bats, as they had a long drive home down to Mornington. A young American student, Andy Gregg, had flown to Australia only two days earlier, and got straight into it



Bat release was in two bites, while Steve finished off the last few bats to be genetically sampled



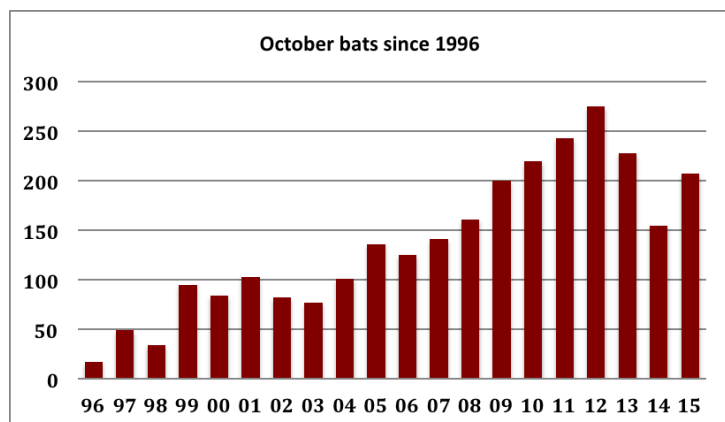
One Gould's landed on the ground, so I set it on my shoulder to warm up and it soon flew off



The number of bats was up on last year to 207 of four

species, spread over 18 boxes:

Box	Bat	Species	Adult	
			M	F
C19	38	Lge Forest	1	37
C42	32	Gould's	4	28
	1	Freetail	1	
C01	31	Gould's	2	29
C14	29	Gould's	2	27
C05	17	Gould's	3	14
C17	13	Gould's	3	10
C35	13	Gould's	1	12
C41	8	Gould's	3	5
C23	7	Gould's	6	1
C27	3	Gould's	2	1
C15	3	Freetail	1	2
C24	2	Gould's	2	
C32	2	Gould's	2	
C36	2	Gould's	2	
C37	2	Gould's	1	1
C40	1	Chocolate	1	
C20	1	Gould's	1	
C29	1	Gould's	1	
	1	Lge Forest		1
	207	Totals	39	168



The numbers of all species fluctuate a lot, but the main cause of fluctuation in the total is Gould's:

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Gould's	214	223	168	134	163
Lge Forest	10	10	59	20	39
Freetail	16	39		10	4
Chocolate					1
Total	241	272	228	164	207
Gould's %	89%	82%	74%	82%	79%

I distributed a single-page guide to what are likely, possible and impossible values for forearms and weights,

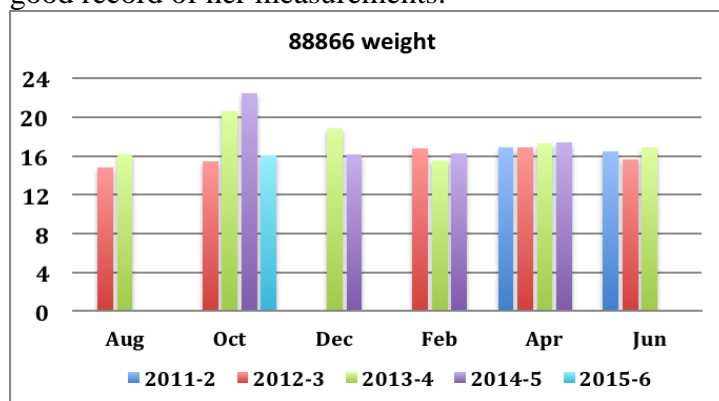
and one result was that all recorded numbers were within the normal range.

Banded & chipped bats

We now have 903 banded bats, plus 77 micro-chipped Freetails, with this month 4 new bands and 3 new chips having been added.

Old Gould's female 88866

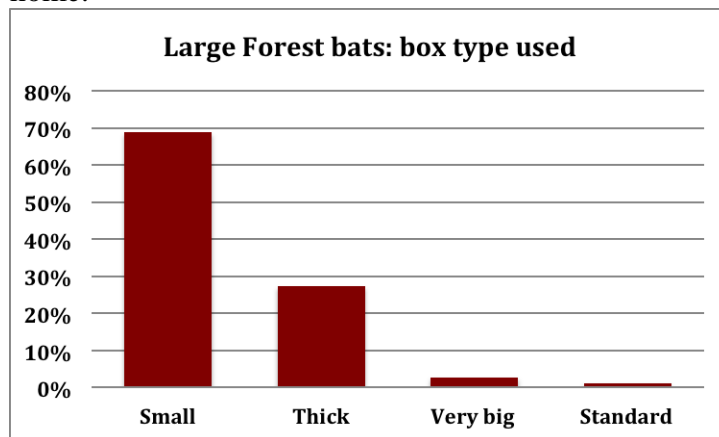
This bat seems to be about a decade old. She has been captured, measured and weighed 19 times in the 22 monitoring sessions since April 2012, so we have a good record of her measurements.



In 2 of the 4 October records, she has been obviously pregnant, quite heavy, but seems to be having a year off breeding this year.

Large forest bats

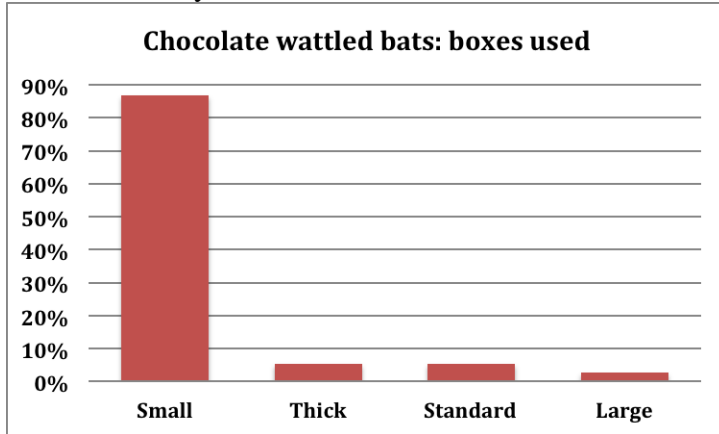
We have records of 88 bats of this species, 8 males and 80 females. This month we had almost half of the banded females, but only 1 male. 6 of the females were banded in Dec 2012 when I received my permit, and all have been recaptured multiple times. They generally only visit during the breeding season, October and December, but this year has been very unusual, as of the 39, 15 were in boxes in April and 13 in June, so they seem to be settling into regarding the boxes as home.



The small boxes with small entrances set up for small bats have been a great success – nearly 70% of the Large Forest bats caught over 20 years have used them.

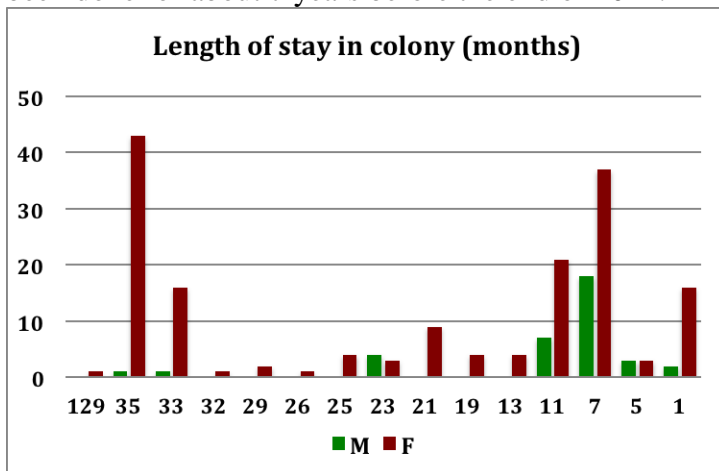
Chocolate wattled bats

We have recent records of 4 of this species, 3 males and a female. Three were banded in 2013. The one caught this month was banded in April, and it is his 3rd capture, so he is almost a regular part of the community. The small boxes have been even more successful with the Chocolate bats – nearly 90% of them have used these boxes over 20 years.



Length of stay in this colony

You can see that nearly all the long-stayers are females, nearly all the males have been with the colony under a year. But two old males have been around from the start. The large group of females banded in Dec. 2012 probably has a mix of ages from 3 to 9, but we have no idea which ones are older or younger as no banding had been done for about 7 years before the end of 2012.



Next box check: Sunday 13 Dec. at 2 p.m.