



ORGAN PIPES NATIONAL PARK

SUGAR GLIDER MONITORING

**April 2017
(Conducted 6th April)**

It has been a few months since the team has checked the sugar glider boxes at the park and we were keen to see what the gliders have been up too.

Meeting at the park at 9.30am, we were greeted by Robert Irvine as well as Martha from Brimbank Council. Robert was waiting on a group of RMIT students as he was taking them on a guided tour of the park. Martha had popped by to have a quick chat about working with us on expanding our project along Jackson's creek to the neighbouring Sydenham Park. We have been planning with her for some time and will update you on any progress as we make it. The first steps include conducting a habitat assessment as well as determining if sugar gliders are in fact present in the park, possibly by setting some camera traps and hairtubes.



Elena and Annika helping while off on the school holidays

At 10am, Terry, Asha, Rowan, Annika, Elena, Trevor and I headed down to Main Flat to begin checking boxes. Starting at box 2, there was one glider inside. This box never disappoints!



Box 2 – One glider inside

As I have mentioned many times before, only some of our nesting boxes are suitable for the pole camera that we have. Many of the boxes still need to be checked with a ladder and need to be modified so we can eliminate using the ladder during future checks. We have some pretty strict safety guidelines that we need to follow when using the ladder and are very keen to have these boxes modified as soon as possible.

MF6, box 3, box 6 and SG1 all could be checked with the camera and had nesting material inside. It wasn't until we checked inside SG2 that we found another glider.

We are beginning to see their nests becoming covered over and therefore it is harder to determine how many gliders are in the boxes as

you'll be able to see in some of the pictures throughout the report.



SG2 – Looking straight up at us!

Asha, Elena, Annika and Rowan headed further along to continue checking camera friendly boxes while Terry geared up to check boxes on the ladder with Trevor and I.



Kara, Terry and Trevor Inspecting SG3

We checked SG3 and SG5 with the ladder and both boxes had 2 gliders in them. Asha asked us to have a peek inside MF5 as when she checked it with the camera they couldn't actually put the camera all the way in....something was blocking the entrance. HONEYCOMB! Trevor organised tools for Terry so that he could take MF5 off the tree, clean it out and take it home to be repaired.



SG3 – A couple of gliders all snuggled up



SG5 – Gliders beginning to cover their nests up for the winter.



MF5 full of honeycomb and a keepsake for our little helpers!

Wow, has that been an information overload so far!?! Well we aren't finished yet. Heading to MF1 and MF2 with the pole camera, Asha, Rowan and the girls were excited and disappointed at the same time. MF1 had 2 gliders inside while MF2 had a cheeky Brushtail possum in it! While checking MF1 Asha, Rowan and the girls bumped into Robert and the students from RMIT and gave them a talk on the nest box monitoring that happens at the Organ Pipes.



Talking with the students from RMIT



Gliders in MF1 are a little hard to see



A cheeky grin in MF2!

Finally it was time to pack up the ute and head to the picnic area for morning tea.



The team taking a well earned break.

After spending some time having a cuppa we walked down to the Organ Pipes to give Annika and Elena a talk about their formation. While we were there we thought it was the perfect opportunity for a group photo.....which I've added at the end of the report.

Moving along to Red Gum Flat, we began at RG5 as usual. Popping the camera inside only to find evidence of a ringtail possum being in there at some stage.



Elena, Asha and Trevor checking RG5.

The next few boxes; box 12, 11, RG6 & RG7 were all empty and had only a few remnants of glider nests and also some ants. When we arrived at RG8 it was pretty certain that the resident Brushtail would be inside..... bingo!



It never gets old seeing that beautiful face

RG9 was also home to another Brushtail possum. Opposite these boxes we placed up some specially designed nesting boxes for Brushtail possums. They were kindly donated by Yvonne who knows a thing or two about Australia's possums. We have found Brushtails using them, however the one flaw in their design is that they are completely sealed close. When we checked the 3 possums boxes this time around, 1 had a possum in it but the other 2 had bees. We now face the task of ways in which we can move the bees on, as we cannot open the box at all.



Possum box 2 with a number of bees around the entry hole.



One last look at the camera before heading home.

Asha and the girls headed off about 12.30 as Asha had to get back to work. It was a great morning having the girls come along and for them to see their favourite animal in the wild.

Trevor, Rowan, Terry and I continued along Red Gum Flat checking the last 3 boxes. RG10 had 1 glider in it. It is one of our lowest boxes, but one that seems optimal for the gliders. Next time we hope to take measurements on heights of boxes and hopefully make some comparisons.



A tiny face poking out of the leaves in RG10

Boxes RG11 and RG12 were both empty. A few months back we replaced RG11 so it was unfortunate that it was completely empty.

RG12 is located right up the end of Red Gum Flat and isn't camera friendly, which means we are always dragging the ladder along to check this box.



RG12 with a new camera hole

We took the opportunity to modify it while there weren't any gliders in sight. We simply drill a hole in the side or front of the box and cover it with a jar lid. It is a little like a doggy door but for the pole camera!

Finally Red Gum Flat was completed so we headed back to Main Flat to check the few remaining boxes on the left hand side of the track.

SG6 and MF3 had ants inside and box 4 and MF9 were completely empty. Box 7 however had two ringtail possums curled up in it.



A happy pair in box 7

Working with regular volunteers means that you soon get to know them and their phobias.... So it was funny to see Trevor pack his daks when we came across this beautiful orb spider in a web sprawled across the path.....(see next page)

After we finished with all the boxes along Main Flat it was time for Trevor to head back to work. It left Rowan, Terry and I to finish checking boxes across the creek before Terry had to head home too.



Golden Orb Weaver

It feels like a lifetime since we checked the nesting boxes across the creek, so we were very keen to see what had been happening over there.

As all boxes across the creek are camera friendly we were able to quickly check them. BW1 had been propped open at our last check and had given a Brushtail possum the opportunity to sneak in.



Why hello there!

Moving along, it was wonderful to see gliders in box 8. This box was originally on Main Flat with no lid and a family of ringtails inside it. After many months when the possums moved out, we were able to take it down, repair it and relocate it over the creek on Black Wattle Flat. Ever since we placed it up on BW Flat we have had gliders in it 90% of the time.



Box 8 – fluffy bottoms

As a team, we have decided to not check BW9, BW11 or BW13 as the design of the box is not practical for checking and the gliders become too stressed. We will have a box maintenance day later in the year where we can focus on repairing, moving and re-designing some of our boxes. This brings me to box 10, which is almost falling off the tree. When we reached BW11, it was on the ground, having fallen completely apart off the tree.



It wasn't our lucky day across the creek because when we reached BW12 it was also on the ground and was full of honeycomb. We have had this theory that if we put carpet on the inside of the lids it will deter bees from attaching their honeycomb to it and therefore deter them from inhabiting the box. For more than 3 years this had worked.... Until now!



BW12 – Fallen off the tree and full of honeycomb, the carpet on the lid is completely covered in it.

I wandered down to BW13 just to make sure it was still okay, and thankfully everything looked intact.

It was disappointing checking across the creek this time around because out of 7 boxes, only 3 were available to gliders.

We loaded up the ute with the repairs and headed back across the creek and out of the park. As always we had a wonderful day checking the nest boxes and thank the volunteers who helped us on the day. Once winter is over, we'll plan a box maintenance day, as it is quite evident that many boxes are in desperate need of repairing. We also have a number of boxes that need to be placed back up. We look forward to our next box check in July.

~Kara, Asha & Terry~

Sugar Gliders (*Petaurus breviceps*) Organ Pipes National Park

Date – 6/4/17

Main Flat- left side of track from Pump shed

Box	Gliders	Comments	Action Required
2	1+		-
MF6	-	Old nest material	-
3	-	Nest material	-
5	-	N/A	Removed
SG1	-	Old nest material	-
SG2	1+		-
6	-	Old Nest material	-
SG3	2		-
MF5	-	Old bee hive	Removed
SG5	2	Lots of nest material	-
SG4	-	Nest material	-
MF4	3		-
MF2	-	Brushtail possum	Propped open

Main Flat- Left side of track from Organ Pipes

Box	Gliders	Comments	Action Required
MF1	2		
SG6	-	Some ants	-
MF3	-	Full of ants	Propped open
7	-	2 Ringtails	-
4	-	Empty	-
MF9	-	Empty	-

Black Wattle Flat- Across creek from pump shed

Box	Gliders	Comments	Action Required
BW1	-	Brushtail possum	-
8	2		-
BW9	-	Did not check	-
10	-		Needs repairs
BW11	-	Fallen off tree	Repair

BW12	-	Fallen off tree	Repair
BW13	-	Did not check	-

Red Gum Flat

Box	Gliders	Comments	Action Required
11	-	Old Ringtail possum nest	-
12	-	Old bird nest	Clean out
RG5	-	Empty, old nest	-
RG6	-	Possibly young present, 1 missing right eye	-
RG7	-	Some ants	-
RG8	-	Brushtail possum	-
RG9	-	Brushtail possum	Lid needs repair, reposition box
RG10	1		Take measurement
RG11	-	Empty	-
RG12	-	Nest material, made camera friendly	-

Possum boxes - Located on Red Gum Flat

Box	Possums	Comments	Action Required
P1	-	Bees	-
P2	-	Bees	-
P3	1	Brushtail possum	-

TOTAL GLIDERS = 14

TOTAL BOXES CHECKED = 37



From left: Trevor, Elena, Annika, Asha, Terry, Rowan and Kara next to The Organ Pipes.