

Sugar Gliders boxes at OPNP

On Tuesday morning, 20 Sept, Terry met up with two Deakin students, Kara Humphrey of Bacchus Marsh and Asha Bannon of Castlemaine, and me, to introduce the young women to the Glider boxes and their problems, and prepare them for taking on a monitoring project



Terry with Kara and Asha



We inspected about 15 boxes of various vintages and designs. Some were the old rectangular boxes with tube entrances dating from the 1990s, like this one, MF7.



It had a large honeycomb hanging from its lid, and at least two Gliders curled up in a nest below



The plywood lid is quite rotten, barely intact



Other old boxes had rotten lids, too. This one had come away from the nail holding the lid in place, which I had wedged under the nail to keep it in place



Two boxes had unoccupied eucalypt leaf nests in them, which had Gliders last time I looked, a few weeks ago, and still seem to hold their shape so may have been used recently. One box had an abandoned nest recently used by a Ringtail – much less skill used in its construction as Ringtails are less fussy than Gliders about architecture.



Abandoned Ringtail nest in lidless Glider box



Courageous (desperate) Brushtail in lidless glider box



Two of the new glider boxes I installed last month had large ant nests in them, so were propped open with big sticks to induce the ants to leave. Looks like they will have the same problems as the bat boxes



The last box we opened had a stack of what seemed to be four Gliders inside including a fairly young one at lower right.



Another new box with an even bigger ant nest. The ants all swarmed out onto the exterior surface and the tree, carrying their eggs and young, as soon as the box was opened, and it should have been empty fairly quickly. One lidless old box had a Brushtail in it, which showed it was prepared to defend its little space to the last drop of blood, extending its claws and baring its teeth in defiance against an animal 35 times its weight.

So a mix of box conditions – all the old plywood fairly rotten so the boxes really needing to be replaced, one of them hanging off its tree at an angle of about 45°. Two boxes were lidless, one with the primitive nest, the other with the Brushtail. Two boxes had families of Gliders and the new boxes are obviously susceptible to ant invasions. All this will make quite a handful for Kara and Asha to manage.

We will be paying for and replacing any boxes they decide should go, but it will be their job to obtain the needed permit, and set up a monitoring program, complete the survey of remaining boxes, assess the population size and notify us of any need to replace boxes.

The sky was very overcast but we had a fairly rain-free two hours after a couple of days of rain.

Robert Bender
20 September 2011