

ORGAN PIPES NATIONAL PARK SUGAR GLIDER MONITORING

January /February 2013

(Conducted 20th Feb)

Yet another glorious day at the Organ pipes to be checking Sugar Glider Nest boxes. We decided to combine January and February checks this time round as we ran out of time to undertake one in January.

Asha ,her sister Abi and I, met Terry and Jason at the Parks office about 10am. Terry had been showing Jason around the once flourishing nursery facilities here at the park. After a short chat with Joe also, the 5 of us headed down in the park for the first check of 2013!

We decided to work as one team this month, starting at box 2 along the left side of Main Flat. Whilst checking the box another keen volunteer Mitchell joined us. Box 2 was home to 2 gliders.



From left- Jason from Gisborne, Abi from Castlemaine and Mitch from Glen Waverly.

We continued along Main Flat, checking MF6 next. When Asha looked inside she seen a tail, but not a sugar glider's! A very happy rat had made a home amongst the eucalypt leaves in MF6!



Box 2- Two gliders in amongst the eucalypt leaves



MF6 – A rat curled up

Most of the nest boxes along Main Flat have nest material in them, some are quite fresh , others old, but it is great to see them being utilised.....even if it is by other animals such as the rat.

SG1 also had one glider inside. There was also clumps of glider fur in amongst the leaves, possibly moulting from juveniles that have been seen in this box.



SG1 – One awake glider

SG2 last moth was full of ants, we removed the stick that was used to prop it open and hopefully gliders will soon be back. SG3 was this month full of ants, this box has consistently housed ants no matter how often we open the lid.



SG3 – Covered in ants

After cheking 6 boxes and finding only nest material and ants, we came to SG5. SG5 was the box in November that gave us 14 gliders, last month it was completely empty and this month, finally another nice surprise... 6 gliders!!! There was at least one male and one juvenile that we could identify.

We checked the last two boxes on the left side of the track ; SG4 was full of ants and MF4 was empty.

MF4 is one of three boxes that are alternatively used each month by the Sugar Gliders along with SG5 and MF3. It's always fun trying to guess which box the gliders will be in this month, at least one or all three of these boxes usually have gliders in them.



SG5 – In this picture you can see 5 of the 6 gliders, can you see them?

After checking the 13 boxes along the left side of Main Flat, we decided to load the ladder onto Jason's ute and head across the other side of the park to Red Gum Flat. We made a quick stop where Terry introduced our new volunteers to the beauty that is the Organ Pipes.

RG5 yet again was only full of spiders and completely empty. Not a great start to RG Flat.



RG5 - Empty

Box 12 was next on the list, the past few checks we have seen gliders in here, possibly the ones that moved out of box 11 as we have discussed in previous reports. This month home to 5 (or 6) gliders, including a male we often see with a cloudy right eye. He was present in this box last month.



Box12- Home to a family of gliders

We loaded the ladder back onto the ute and moved onto boxes RG8 and RG9, both home to Brushtail possums. We are looking at putting up a couple of new glider boxes on the same tree as these boxes; it may encourage gliders back into the area.



RG9- Our friend ready for action once again

Asha as always, checked box 10 right next to Rosette Rock. Last month she jumped when she saw a Gould's wattle bat hanging off the lid, this month it gave her another surprise, a mother rat with a number of tiny babies. This is definitely a 'lucky dip' box, we never know what we are going to find.



Box 10 – A mother rat and her babies (you can just see glimpse of her young under her chin).

Loading the ladder again, the last two boxes along Red Gum Flat were checked. Last month we were shocked when we came across RG11 and it was turned upside down and completely empty. Hopeful that the disturbance didn't harm or scare the gliders away we were excited to look inside. Thankfully 2 little faces greeted us!



RG11- 2 gliders

RG12 this month had 4 gliders inside. At this stage of the day we had a total of 20 gliders, we still had 7 boxes to check back along the right side of Main Flat and across the creek.



RG12- a family of 4



The team taking some time at Tessellated pavement

We started back at Main Flat on the right hand side of the track at SG6. Although there was honeycomb on the lid, there were no bees present and unfortunately no gliders either. MF3 turned up 5 more gliders to add to the count this month. We were very happy to see the family in there.

Box 7 was again empty, Box 4 is still full of bees and MF9 turned up yet another rat!! That's 3 in total for the day. The sugar gliders not only have to compete with possums for shelter but now they have to compete with rats, an interesting find!



MF3 – A happy family



MF9 – Hard to see in the photo but a rat has made a nest out of Acacia leaves in this box. The nest also has a unique shape, different to gliders.

Once again we loaded up the ladder onto Jason's ute and headed across the creek to check the two boxes we have on Black Wattle Flat. Yet again I managed to smell something potent in BW6; on further inspection a dead adult glider was buried amongst the nest material.



Dead glider found in BW6

We are unsure why this occurs, there is not of lot of literature on Sugar Gliders. They are quite a poorly studied species; I suppose that is because they are not listed as endangered. Hopefully one day the data that we collect every month will be put to good use in hopes that we will be able to understand Sugar Glider ecology in much more detail.

After photographing the dead glider, we continued onto Box 10. We have only ever had 1 record of gliders in this box; this month made it our second! 1 glider was inside all curled up underneath a mountain of nest material. A great finish to the day. Unfortunately we couldn't get a photo. We finished up with 26 gliders, a second best record!



Jackson's Creek



Kara and Mitch heading back to the Pump shed

Next month we will be taking a different approach to our Monitoring program, we have decided that after a year of monitoring that our nest box checks will take

place every second month, whilst every alternate month we will dedicate our time to other tasks.

Tasks such as repairing and placing up new boxes, planting glider 'food' such as Black Wattles, making up tree frames and looking at possible new sites for glider boxes are amongst the ideas we have.

As the numbers of boxes are growing, we feel that checking every second month will give us extra time to focus on other important tasks that contribute to a healthy glider population within the Park.

An email will be sent out shortly to let you know which activity we will be undertaking next month!

Thank you to our volunteers Abi, Jason and Mitch.

~ Kara, Asha and Terry~

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

Date - 20/02/13

Main Flat- left side of track from Pump shed

Box	Gliders	Comments	Action Required
2	2	Nest material	-
MF6	-	1 Rat, Nest material	Needs new lid
3	-	Nest material, old	-
5	-	Nest material	-
SG1	1	Nest material, clumps of fur amongst nest	-
SG2	-	Stick removed and lid closed	-
6	-	Empty, nest material	-
SG3	-	ANTS	Lid propped open
8	-	Empty	-
MF5	-	Nest material	-
SG5	6	1 male and at least 1 juvenile	-
SG4	-	Ants	Lid propped open
MF4	-	Empty, nest material	-

Main Flat- Left side of track from Organ Pipes

Box	Gliders	Comments	Action Required
SG6	-	Honeycomb on lid	Remove
MF3	5	Nest Material	-
7	-	Empty	-
4	-	Bees	-
MF9	-	Rat	-

Black Wattle Flat- Across creek from pump shed

Box	Gliders	Comments	Action Required
BW6	-	Dead glider	Box needs cleaning out
BW2	-	N/A	-
BW5	-	N/A	-
10	1	Dense nest material	Needs screw replaced

Red Gum Flat

Box	Gliders	Comments	Action Required
11	-	Was removed last month	-
12	5	Male, cloudy right eye 4 adults, 1 juvenile	-
RG5	-	Spiders	-
RG8	-	Brushtail possum	Remove for repairs
RG9	-	Brushtail possum	-
RG10	-	1 rat + babies	-
RG11	2	1 male	-
RG12	4	2 adults, 2 juveniles	-

TOTAL GLIDERS = **26!!!**

TOTAL BOXES CHECKED = **28**

NEXT MONTHS CHECK TO BE ADVISED!



*The team taking some time at Jackson's Creek after checking 28 boxes.
(from left): Kara, Jason, Terry, Mitch, Abi and Asha*

