



ORGAN PIPES NATIONAL PARK

SUGAR GLIDER MONITORING

March 31st 2014

On March 31st Kara and I met Martha Ragg from Brimbank Council at Sydenham Park. Unfortunately Terry was sick and couldn't join us that day. The idea was to scout out the area for Sugar glider nest boxes and assess their condition. As Sydenham Park is the closest park with significant Sugar glider habitat we have thought about starting to monitor there eventually.

We were not able to get a ladder into the park, however we used our pole camera to check boxes that had suitable entry holes or where unlatched. We were able to tell that some boxes were not being used from seeing cobwebs covering the entry hole.

We found 15 nest boxes in the park overall. A surprising number of the boxes were in very good condition, but none of those that we checked had Sugar gliders inside. However, there were many trees in the park that were large enough to have hollows and quite a few Black Wattles (which are popular sources of food for gliders), so it is possible that there are gliders using the natural habitat in the park instead of the boxes.

Ants had taken over two of the nest boxes and active bee hives were in two others. We also found old beehives in three of the nest boxes.

We do not currently have any concrete plans for Sugar glider monitoring in Sydenham Park. Some of our ideas include checking the hollows there for the presence of Sugar gliders and creating a corridor between Organ Pipes NP and Sydenham Park. A corridor would enable young male gliders to disperse and take advantage of new habitat. If there are other gliders in Sydenham Park and they

breed with the Organ Pipes gliders, it would be great for increasing genetic diversity and reducing the risks of inbreeding in the population.

Thanks to Martha for her help accessing the park and checking the boxes, and for her ongoing support of our project.

May 1st 2014

On Thursday May 1st Terry, Kara and I met up with Lorissa, Susannah and Hien who had come along to help out.

We started off on Main Flat and worked our way through the nest boxes starting at Box 2. In Box 2 we found nest material. Even though there weren't any gliders inside, it is good to know that the box is being used. We found nest material in eleven of our boxes this check.



Sugar glider nest material in Box 2



Sugar glider nest material in Box 3

In MF6 we found three beautiful gliders snuggled up. We are getting to the time of year when the gliders are starting to make their nests more closed over to keep them warm. This makes it harder to count them in some of the later months, but this time we were still able to make reasonable estimates. On Main Flat we also found Sugar gliders in Box 6, MF5 and MF4.



Two gliders in MF4



Glider looking at the camera in MF4

Unfortunately four of our boxes had ants using them. The number of ants ranged from a scattering colonising a box to a full blown nest which coated the entire inside of the box. We propped them open using a stick to create harsher environmental conditions inside the box and make it a less comfortable place for the ants to live. This usually works to discourage them, although we have had cases of ants returning after a while if gliders don't start using the box.



Three gliders in MF6



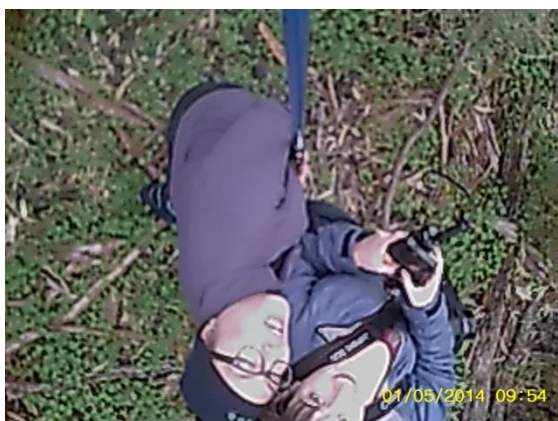
At least two gliders in MF5



Ant colony in Box 7



Box propped open with a stick



Lorissa and Susannah's selfie

Hien had to leave at this point, so we stopped for a cuppa and some biscuits. We then moved on to check the boxes on Red Gum Flat.

Three of our Sugar gliders boxes had Brush-tailed possums living in them this check. One had even reoccupied RG8 which we had only just put back up after it was repaired by Terry. They are able to get into latched boxes and

can do quite a bit of damage to the boxes after a while. We are going to put up some boxes specifically designed for Brush-tailed possums next month. We hope that they will prefer them and move out of the Sugar glider boxes (which are really too small for them anyway).



Brush-tailed possum in RG7



Brush-tailed possum in RG8



Brush-tailed possum in RG9

While on Red Gum Flat we put up a new RG10 box near Rosette Rock. It is up higher than the previous RG10, so hopefully it will attract more gliders this time around.



New RG10 box put up this month

We also stumbled across the very curious sight of a dead Dusky Wood swallow caught in the bark of a tree. We are unsure as to how it ended up there, but it may have crashed while being chased by a predator. While tragic, it was amazing to see one of these beautiful birds up close.



Dusky Wood swallow caught on a tree

At least two Sugar gliders were using RG11, the nest box closest to the Tessellated Pavement. After checking this box we took a group photo on the Tessellated Pavement next to the creek.



Almost covered over nest in RG11



At least 2 Sugar gliders in RG11



Yvonne talking with Kara and Asha

After meeting with Yvonne we decided to check our nest boxes on the other side of the creek on Black Wattle Flat. We were joined by Britni who was walking in the park and decided to help us out.



Group photo at Tessellated Pavement

Thank you to Lorissa, Susannah and Hien for your help. We always love to have people come along and share our love for Sugar gliders.

May 5th 2014

On the Monday after our nest box check we met up with Yvonne at Organ Pipes NP to talk about the eye problems we have been observing for some time in the Sugar gliders. She was very helpful and interesting to talk with. As well as sharing her ideas about the glider eye problems with us, Yvonne suggested that we put up some nest boxes specifically designed for Brush-tailed possums up in the park. We hope that this will encourage the possums to leave our Sugar glider boxes.



Asha, Kara, Britni and Yvonne

We found some nest material in BW6 and ants in Box 10. Once again there were gliders using Box 8. It is great to see that they are using this box as it was put up on Black Wattles Flat fairly recently.



Two Sugar gliders in Box 8

We were very excited to find gliders in BW1 for the first time since it was put up! This is a super box that was made to be extra sturdy in the hope that it will last longer than our other boxes.



Three Sugar gliders in BW1

Thank you Yvonne and Britni for your help and enthusiasm!

June 10th 2014

Kara is on her honeymoon this month (hooray!), so Terry and I went out to the park together to put up the Brush-tailed possum boxes that Yvonne helped us to get.

The boxes were a bit challenging to put up, partly due to their large size and partly because we were putting them up using chains rather than bolts. There was a lot of manouvering and hoisting involved, but it was very satisfying to see those boxes up there in the end!



Terry putting up P2 on Red Gum Flat



Terry using the safety harness to put up P2

We put the possum boxes up on Red Gum Flat fairly close to the possums in glider boxes. We have three new boxes (P1, P2 and P3) to attract the three possums.



P1 put up on Red Gum Flat

Terry fitted the new boxes with special covered holes which will allow us to check the possum boxes using our pole camera.



P1 with a hole for our pole camera on the side

We hope that the Brush-tailed possums will prefer these boxes to our Sugar glider nest boxes. They are larger and more suitable for them. Moving into the new boxes will be beneficial for both the possums and the gliders.

Next time we go out we will be checking our glider boxes. We will let you know the date closer to the time. If you would like to be added to our mailing list or if you have any questions about the Sugar glider project, please email us at sugarglidersopnp@yahoo.com.au

~ Asha, Kara and Terry ~



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

Date – 1/5/14 and 5/5/14 Main Flat- left side of track from Pump shed

Box	Gliders	Comments	Action Required
2	-	Nest material	-
MF6	3	-	-
3	-	Nest material	-
5	-	Nest material	-
SG1	-	Nest material	-
SG2	-	Nest material	-
6	1+	-	-
SG3	-	Nest material	Lid a bit loose
MF5	2+	Left cloudy eye	-
SG5	-	Nest material	-
SG4	-	Ants	Needs to be straightened
MF4	2	-	-
MF2	-	Ants	Propped open

Main Flat- Left side of track from Organ Pipes

Box	Gliders	Comments	Action Required
SG6	-	Some ants, nest material	Propped open
MF3	-	Nest material	-
7	-	Ants	-

4	-	Bees	-
MF9	-	Nest material	-

Black Wattle Flat- Across creek from pump shed

Box	Gliders	Comments	Action Required
BW1	3	1 st time gliders! (5/5/14)	-
BW6	-	Nest material, debris (5/5/14)	-
8	2	- (5/5/14)	-
10	-	Ants (5/5/14)	- Propped open - To be removed

Red Gum Flat- Right side of track from Organ Pipes

Box	Gliders	Comments	Action Required
11	-	Old Ringtail nest	-
12	-	Nest material, some ants	-
RG5	-	Nest material, 1 st sighting ever!	-
RG6	-	Empty nest	-
RG7	-	1 Brush tail	-
RG8	-	1 Brush tail	-
RG9	-	1 Brush tail	-
RG10	-	Put up box	-
RG11	2+	-	Scats
RG12	-	-	-

4 gliders in MF5 on 5/5/14 – one with mucus on eyelid