WILDLIFE HABITAT IN THE WOMBAT FOREST

The survival of many birds and native animals in the Wombat Forest is threatened by overlogging, woodchipping and 'regeneration' burning.

by Monty Kirby,
Committee Member, Wombat Forest Society.

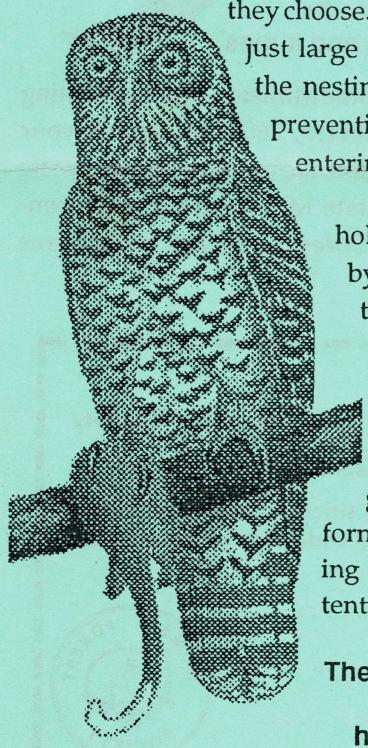
Of the 385 species of birds in Victoria, 60 nest and roost in tree hollows. About 20 of these species occur in the Wombat Forest and tree hollows are vital for their survival. In fact, birds like boobook owls, most of the parrots, and cockatoos, tree creepers and tree martins, all need tree hollows, and will nest nowhere else.

Native mammals need hollows even more than birds. Of the 75 species of non-marine mammals, 31 depend on hollows for sleeping and or breeding. All of the gliders, brushtail possums, the tuan, and several species of bat, need suitable hollows for daylight shelter as well as homes to safely rear their young. Many of the reptiles, and even some frogs, also use hollows.

Hollows are as important to all these animals as food, air and water, for if they are deprived of any one of them they will not survive.

Suitable hollows

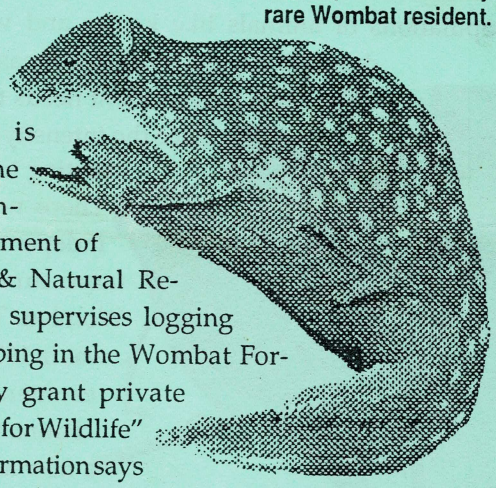
Most birds and animals which nest in hollows are very selective about the size and position of the hollows they choose. The entrance hole has to be just large enough to permit entry of the nesting animal or bird, thereby preventing larger predators from entering.



When galahs nest in a hollow which is surrounded by green bark they chew away the bark. This prevents the hollow from healing over and sealing the hole, ensuring a nesting site for many years to come. The galahs also promote the formation of hollows by chewing the bark from around potential hollows.

The powerful owl is up to 55 cm high, and requires hollows from old trees for nesting and breeding.

Department Admits Need For Wildlife Hollows



The tiger quoll: extremely rare Wombat resident.

Wildlife information is supplied by the State Government's Department of Conservation & Natural Resources (which supervises logging and woodchipping in the Wombat Forest) when they grant private property "Land for Wildlife" status. This information says that hollows only large enough for the tiny feathertail gliders can take 100 years to form. Sugar glider and rosella-size hollows can take 200 years, and larger ones for cockatoos, kookaburras and powerful owls much longer.

Research I did 30 years ago on nesting birds showed that over 80% of eggs laid in nests did not develop into flying young. This high mortality rate is brought about by natural disasters and predators.

Local naturalist, Barry Golding, has done research into hollow-nesting birds in the Wombat Forest. In 1972 he produced similar figures to mine, so it is quite clear that *any human interference could be enough to tip the balance against our birds' survival.*

Birds I have not seen in the Wombat Forest for 20 years include:

- the olive whistler
- the crescent honeyeater
- the white-winged triller
- the rufous fantail; and
- the grey butcherbird.

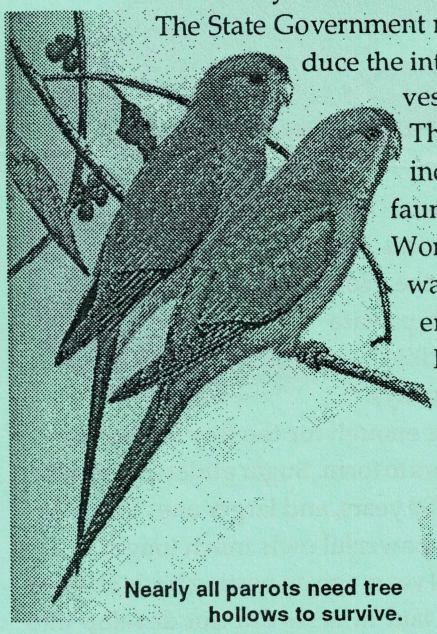
Were the lyrebird and king parrot ever in the Wombat? Some sketchy reports say the king parrot was, until the miners and sawmillers devastated the forest at the end of the last century. Both these species occur in the forests on either side of the Wombat.

Impact of logging

The birds and animals mentioned above require hollows which only form in old trees. They also need large areas of reasonably undisturbed forest which will support

smaller creatures for them to prey on. It's no good leaving the odd token habitat tree for an animal to nest in if there are few others around for their prey to nest in.

With the scale of timber harvesting in force at present I fear for the future survival of our precious wildlife. Overlogging, woodchipping, burning the forest after these operations, leaving minimal streamside buffer zones, and returning to cut down the seed and habitat trees ten years after logging are all current management practices in the Wombat. Animals like the tuan, and the tiger quoll cannot simply be given a road map and told to make their way to safe forest areas like the Lerderderg State Park. And populations of animals like koalas and wombats have dramatically declined in the past 20 years.

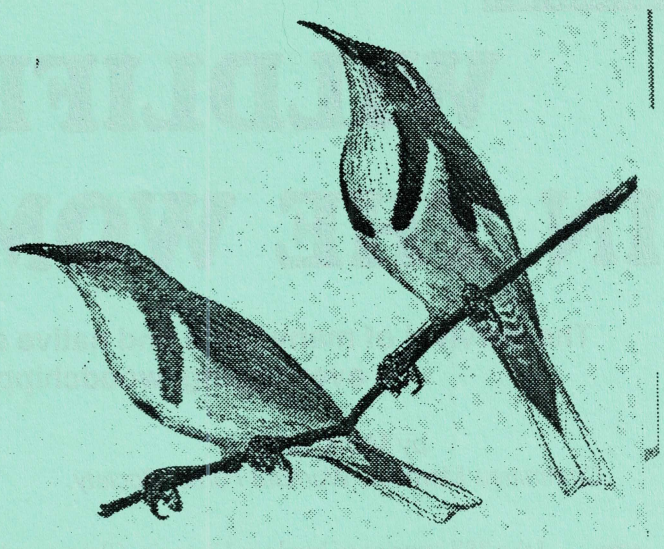


Nearly all parrots need tree hollows to survive.

The State Government needs to urgently reduce the intensity of timber harvesting in the Wombat. There needs to be an independent flora and fauna survey done in the Wombat. The last survey was in 1973 but the Government's Flora and Fauna Guarantee Officer admits that this was only a spot survey, and in fact, *there has never been a comprehensive pre-logging flora and fauna survey done in the Wombat.* In other words, the Department has no idea of the impact of its operations on the wildlife populations in the forest.

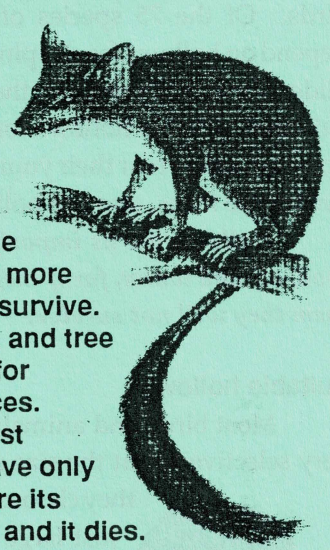
What Can Be Done

The State Government has proven itself incapable of good stewardship and management of this vital public forest. The federal Government needs to immediately halt export woodchipping from the Wombat, and take over management of the forest from the State, because it is a sensitive conservation zone.



Crescent honeyeaters — birds which Monty Kirby has not seen in the Wombat Forest for 20 years.

Next, all timber harvesting needs to be reduced in volume, intensity and area. That is, less area harvested each year, by selective rather than clearfelling methods, and less timber taken out of each forest block.



The tuan, or brush-tailed phascogale, is a rare animal living in the Wombat Forest. It requires large areas of undisturbed forest to survive in its habitat. Males require large continuous forest areas of more than 100 hectares each to survive. Their prey is large insects, and tree hollows are vital for them for nesting and for food sources.

The tuan is the largest mammal in the world to have only one breeding season before its immune system collapses and it dies.

You can write to the Prime Minister, Mr Paul Keating (c/- Parliament house, Canberra, 2600) to express your concerns and request the action above. You can also write to your local Federal and State MPs with the same concerns, and join the Wombat Forest Society so we can save our forest.

☐ Please sign me up as a member of the Wombat Forest Society for one year.

MEMBERSHIP FEES Please make cheques payable to the **Wombat Forest Society**

☐ Individual — $16 per year ☐ Concession — $12 per year ☐ Household — $18 per year

☐ **DONATION:** I enclose $ ..... to help.

(All membership details are strictly confidential and will not be disclosed to anyone under any circumstances)

Name .....

Address .....

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Please mail to: Wombat Forest Society Inc, PO Box 51 Trentham, 3458.

WOMBAT FOREST SOCIETY

For further information, write to our office above, or come and talk to us at our stall at the Sunday Daylesford market.