

Feather Fascination!

with local Birdwatcher,

Jim Butler

Powerful Owls "Whoo-hoo"!

WHY Powerful? Because they are the only Australian bird that can fly carrying prey (Brush Turkey) that weigh more than they do! The Powerful Owl is the largest (65 cm, span 1.3 m, 2 kg) of Australia's 11 owl species. It is listed as "threatened" because it only breeds in very old eucalypts (150 to 400 years) that have large hollows (> 0.5 m deep). Such trees are increasingly rare due to urbanisation, land clearing and bush fires. This apex predator with lifelong bonding (30 years), holds year-round territories. In good habitats 4 km² can support a pair but they need 40 km² where it is poor. Their distribution is east coast Australia; south from Mackay to western Victoria, including urban areas of Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne.



During the evenings of May to October the loud "whoo-hoo" calls of the Powerful Owl can be heard along the creeks of the Western Suburbs. Powerful owls hunt early in the night beside creeks because of abundant prey. I have witnessed, beside Moggill Creek at Kenmore, the event in the adjacent photo. They prey on possums, gliders, lorikeets and flying foxes. They also have the peculiar habit of roosting during the day with their previous night's prey dangling. The average nightly distance travelled per owl is 4.5 km. As an apex predator, Powerful Owls are an important urban species regulating populations of arboreal mammals which can reach extremely high densities.

Birdlife Australia is conducting the Powerful Owl Citizen Science Project funded by the Queensland Government and SEQ Councils. Because of the "threatened" classification, the Government is responsible for their conservation; which requires data about their ecology and threats. The Project researches Owl numbers, distribution and breeding success in SEQ. Because the Owls are easily detectable by their calls, 400 SEQ urban volunteers are involved in the Project. You could help by monitoring Owls from now to October as a citizen scientist. Contact rob.clemens@birdlife.org.au

They are whoo-hoo'ing out there now!

~ Jim

Contact Jim: beautifulbirds@y7mail.com
Digital Bird Guide: <http://www.moggillcreek.org/>

Image: Powerful Owl with
Flying Fox at day roost by
Amanda Robertson.