

WESTERN CONSERVATION ALLIANCE

An alliance of conservation groups focusing on western NSW

Briefing 2: HOW LOGGING HARMS THE ENVIRONMENT

- Logging and firewood collection have a major impact on the environment, which is well documented in the scientific literature. It is particularly evident in the BBS region, on both public and private lands.
- The combined affect of heavy cypress and ironbark logging in the BBS has resulted in the conversion of mixed eucalypt/cypress forests with grassy understoreys to dense cypress monocultures, with depleted grass layers. This severely impedes the regeneration of the eucalypt-grassy understorey complex and drastically reduces the habitat niches available. This has contributed to the decline and extinction of grassy woodland species.
- Large old ironbark trees are one of the most important habitat resources in the region. They provide numerous hollows – both in the trunk and as holes that form over time when branches drop. Hollows only begin to form in trees when they are more than 150 years old.
- These hollows are used by many birds and animals for shelter, roosting and nesting. According to the literature, 70% of Australia’s birds and animals, which use hollows in old trees, are woodland species. So old trees in woodland ecosystems are particularly important. Species that use these trees include parrots, possums, gliders and owls, many of them endangered.
- It is expected that the next big wave of extinctions in NSW and Australia will be of hollow-dependent species because of the widespread destruction of old forests and old trees across the continent.
- In the BBS, logging has severely reduced the numbers of old cypress and ironbark trees, and the medium-sized trees required to replace them across all tenures. Because these trees grow so slowly (approximately 1-2mm girth per year) it takes many hundreds of years to recover the habitat that is lost to logging.
- The ironbark logging in the BBS region has been so severe that hollow-using species such as ring-tailed and brush-tailed possums, that were once common in the region, are now almost extinct. Recent surveys have recorded them on only a couple of occasions.
- All remaining large ironbarks, and all medium-sized ironbarks which will one day replace them, are now crucial to the survival of a large number of birds and animals in the region.

- An immediate end to ironbark logging on public land and strict controls on any logging on private land may well save many bird and animal species now teetering on the brink of extinction in the region.
- Large old trees also provide the best and most abundant nectar sources for birds and bats. These are particularly important in the BBS, because it has been recognised as a transit zone and a critical over-wintering area in the East Australian Bird Migration System.
- The BBS should contain flowering eucalypts throughout the year which provide critical food resources in autumn and spring for migratory species and over-wintering habitat for a large number of bird groups including honeyeaters and flycatchers (Nix 1976, Nix 1993). Logging diminishes this resource significantly.
- Firewood collection is now listed as a threatening process under the NSW Threatened Species Conservation Act. It has been shown to have a severe impact on the many lizards, snakes, birds and small mammals in the BBS, which require dead trees and fallen logs for shelter, nesting and foraging.