

Community Consultation

Consultation with regional communities was a key element of the establishment of the West Victoria Regional Forest Agreement (RFA). The planning team consulted widely and an independent panel was established by the Victorian Government to consider submissions on the RFA and to advise on key issues.

As outlined above, community submissions resulted in the establishment of an additional protected area for Powerful Owls near Trentham.

In signing the Agreement, the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments have agreed that it provides a balanced outcome for the environment, jobs and the economy in the region.

Following completion of the Agreement last year, the Minister for Environment and Conservation arranged for a meeting between *Actively Conserving Trentham*, senior NRE Flora and Fauna policy staff, and experts on Powerful Owl conservation to explain the Government's decision to establish the 500 hectare reserve near Trentham.

As part of the Government's commitment to proper scrutiny in forest management, there is an ongoing opportunity for the community to actively participate in decisions for sustainable forest management through regional forest reference groups.

More Information

If you would like to discuss the management of Powerful Owls in the Midlands, contact the Regional Forest Manager for Western Victoria in the NRE Ballarat Office on **(03) 5333 6544**.

The Midlands Forest Management Plan and the Powerful Owl Action Statement may be found on the NRE web site: **www.nre.vic.gov.au**

The West Victoria RFA may be obtained on the RFA web site: **www.rfa.gov.au**

Find information about NRE on the Internet at www.nre.vic.gov.au

© The State of Victoria, Department of Natural Resources and Environment, 2001

This brochure may be of assistance to you but the State of Victoria and its employees do not guarantee that the brochure is without flaw of any kind or is wholly appropriate for your particular purposes and therefore disclaims all liability for any error, loss or other consequence which may arise from you relying on any information in this brochure.



PROTECTING VICTORIA'S POWERFUL OWLS



About the Powerful Owl

The Powerful Owl is one of Australia's most spectacular birds. With a head to tail length of up to 65cm, it is Australia's largest owl, but only rarely is this nocturnal predator observed.

Occupying forests and woodlands throughout much of Victoria, the Powerful Owl preys on possums and birds, mostly taken among the branches of its forest habitat.

Powerful Owls live in pairs and defend a territory. The size of the territory depends on the abundance of prey. As a general rule, 500 hectares of mature forest is considered necessary to support a pair of Powerful Owls.

The major cause of habitat loss for the Powerful Owl was forest clearing for agriculture and urban development. The owls nest in large tree hollows in the canopy of mature forest, and a reduction in availability of suitable hollows may adversely affect breeding success. Activities such as timber harvesting without careful planning can therefore impact on their conservation.

The Powerful Owl is considered an endangered species and is listed as threatened under Victoria's Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act. An Action Statement established under the Act guides the management of the species and requires that specific protection for the habitat of 500 pairs of Powerful Owls across the State to conserve their population.

Managing the Powerful Owl Population

The Department of Natural Resources and Environment (NRE) is committed to the management of Victoria's State forests to ensure a sustainable balance between sometimes competing issues. NRE ensures that forest ecosystems are maintained or enhanced and water supplies, wildlife and sensitive environmental and cultural values are protected. In addition, local communities should continue to benefit from timber production, recreation and other forest uses.

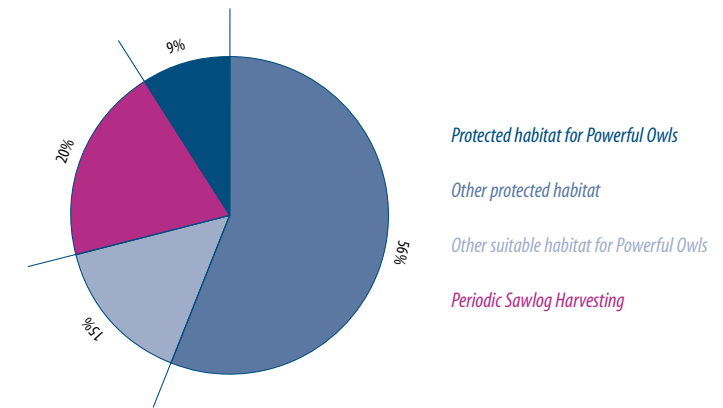
To conserve the population of the spectacular Powerful Owls in their natural environment, careful planning and management of their habitat is required.

The 500 pair habitat target prescribed in the Action Statement is considered necessary to sustain a population of Powerful Owls across Victoria. This target is divided between the various regions of the State, in proportion to the amount of forest.

Powerful Owls in the Midlands Forest Management Area

In accordance with the Action Statement, sufficient habitat for 25 pairs of owls (approximately 25,000 hectares) is protected within the Midlands Forest Management Area, which includes the Wombat State Forest. In total, 114,867 hectares of the Midlands are protected within parks, reserves and State Forest Special Protection Zones (areas of State forest where timber harvesting is prohibited). Powerful Owl expert and NRE ecologist, Richard Loyn, said that, "the strategy will protect core habitat for 25 pairs of powerful owls in the Midlands FMA, and 500 pairs state-wide. The owls will range more widely than the designated areas, using mature forest and regrowth, as they show little respect for artificial boundaries". Outcomes will be monitored, and the strategy reviewed if necessary. Provisional results from eastern Victoria show that the strategy has been effective in ensuring that powerful owls continue to survive and breed.

Recently, concerns have been raised about habitat for a pair of Powerful Owls near Trentham. 500 hectares of mature forest, the most suitable habitat for owls, have subsequently been selected for protection in the West Victoria Regional Forest Agreement. This is in addition to the 25,000 hectares required under the Action Statement and is part of the large number of protected areas within the Midlands Forest Management Area that are suitable owl habitat.



How are protected areas determined?

Powerful Owl protected areas are based on a combination of actual records of the bird and where suitable habitat is located. Knowledge of Powerful Owls and their habitat comes from formal surveys or reports of observations provided by bird watchers or NRE staff. These observations are recorded in a database called the Atlas of Victorian Wildlife, which currently holds records of 66 observations from the Midlands FMA. Several new records were obtained through surveys conducted for the Regional Forest Agreement.

The protected areas are established during forest planning projects such as the Regional Forest Agreements or Forest Management Plans. This ensures they form part of an integrated forest management system and their proposed establishment provides an opportunity for public consultation.