



Ornithologist Simon Cherriman tracks birds using a GPS transmitter. Credit: Supplied/David Baylis d440293

Gazette
HILLS AVON VALLEY

Mundaring prescribed burn causes death of wedge-tailed eagle chicks

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A SCIENTIST monitoring wedge-tailed eagles in the Hills has been saddened by the death of two eagle chicks in a recent prescribed burn.

Simon Cherriman said the deaths of the unborn eaglets, who fell from their nest and died before they had a chance to hatch, was a tragic outcome in Mt Helena which could have been prevented.

"Fire management practices in our forests need to improve so they don't have the same outcome as the Parkerville bushfires in 2014," he said.

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"As well as countless other native animals and highly important habitat trees which are hundreds of years old, the death of these eagles is a clear example of why we need to place emphasis on taking a community approach to fuel-load reduction.

"Pressure on authorities to conduct burning activities without proper planning or impact minimisation has left two devastated birds of prey circling their nest site, screaming for their loss."

He was concerned the recent prescribed burn was "yet another example of humanity's hypocrisy and inability to be consistent with its own supposed laws".

"If we are serious about existing legislation to protect wildlife and animal welfare, then we as a society must act to ensure this legislation is adhered to."

Greens WA biodiversity spokeswoman Lynn MacLaren said the danger of bushfire was greater than ever in WA as summers get warmer.

But she said the Department of Parks and Wildlife was shrinking at a time when it could ill afford to.

"The department will lose about 100 full-time employees this year from last year's 1600 staff," she said.

Just one unit within Parks and Wildlife is expanding: 10 new positions dedicated to prescribed burning have been created, bringing full-time staff dedicated to burning to 240, with another 100 workers employed seasonally.

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The Department's total budget this year was \$297 million, down from \$308 million two years ago.

Ms MacLaren said prescribed burn figures the Government used were adopted in the 1970s and had not been updated since.

She cited UWA biodiversity specialist Professor Stephen Hopper's view that the practice of prescribed burns should be questioned if biodiversity conservation was the aim.

"The circumstances of the chilling, unnecessary death of two endangered wedgetailed eagle chicks during a prescribed burning last month seems proof enough that level of co-operation is still not happening," Ms MacLaren said.

Mr Cherriman said he was devastated when he discovered the prescribed burn reached 25m into the forest canopy in Mt Helena, killing the eaglets when they fell to the burning understory.

"Research has shown that eagle productivity in WA can be very low, and possibly only 10 per cent of birds which fledge from their nest will survive to adulthood," he said.

"The number of 200-plus year habitat trees which were destroyed by the fire is also a serious concern for three nationally threatened species of black cockatoo which need these trees for nests."

DPaW's website said prescribed burns created low-fuel areas in a mosaic of burnt and unburnt patches across the landscape, to help stem the spread of bushfires.

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Prescribed burning was the primary tool available to Parks and Wildlife to manage fuel loads, which helped protect the community by minimising the impact of bushfires.

Mr Cherriman said he was heartened when representatives of DPaW contacted him to obtain locations of eagles nest sites so they could plan around them in future prescribed burns.

"I'm not blaming the department," he said.



"They are doing their best with minimal resources."

Details of burns are available on Parks and Wildlife's [website](#).



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