

Further Information on Southern Ark

Bringing back the biodiversity

Across Australia predation by foxes has played a role in the decline of many native wildlife species.

The Southern Ark project aims to benefit the biodiversity of East Gippsland's native species through fox control.

The decline of the fox is likely to significantly benefit a wide range of predators.

Spot-tailed Quolls and Sooty Owls are only two of those species.

There are two other species of owl, the Powerful Owl and the Masked Owl, that are likely to benefit from increasing possum, bandicoot and potoroo numbers.

Of the large reptiles in the region, the Lace Monitor and the Diamond Python are both species that prey on small to medium-sized mammals and the reduced competition from foxes should be to their advantage.

- Contact the Department of Sustainability and Environment's Customer Service Centre on 136 186
- Contact the department's Orbost office on (03) 5161 1222
- Visit the department's website: www.dse.vic.gov.au
- Email queries to: southern.ark@dse.vic.gov.au

Cover photos: Sooty Owl DSE/Ed McNabb (left), Spot-tailed Quoll DSE/McCann (right)

Published by the Victorian Government Department of Sustainability and Environment
Melbourne, August 2008

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Authorised by the Victorian Government, 8 Nicholson Street, East Melbourne.

Printed by Stream Solutions
Printed on 100% Recycled paper

ISBN 978-1-74208-391-9

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Southern Ark

bringing back the biodiversity...

The Hunters



Southern Ark project

Benefiting the biodiversity of East Gippsland through fox control

THE HUNTERS

South-eastern Australia is home to a large number of native predators. Some are mammals, others are birds, and yet others are large reptiles. Most of these hunters have declined since the arrival of the fox, a resourceful killer that has systematically hunted-out not only the prey of these native predators, but many of the predators as well. While foxes can often survive on small mammals, insects or blackberries, once the native mammals have been reduced to very low numbers, the native predators like quolls, goannas, pythons or large forest owls have less adaptability in their diet. Less prey means less native carnivores, often to a stage where they disappear altogether.

Let's look at a couple of predators that will benefit from the decline of the fox.

While the Southern Ark project aims to reduce the fox population to assist in the recovery of the species that foxes prey upon such as potoroos, bandicoots and possums, a flow-on effect of this will be the recovery of native carnivores. Fewer foxes and more prey will mean that as the prey recovers, the predators will recover as well.

THE SPOT-TAILED QUOLL

This cat-sized marsupial carnivore is a beautiful, yet pugnacious, animal. A rich reddish-brown in colour, its fur liberally splashed with white spots as camouflage, this forest-dwelling animal hunts a wide range of mammal prey, including possums, potoroos and bandicoots.

This places it in direct competition with the fox.

Foxes are also known to occasionally catch and kill quolls. Where foxes are abundant, quolls appear to be rare, and conversely where quoll populations are strong it may be because foxes are low in number.

As an animal that can exist across a wide range of habitat types, the quoll really only needs somewhere to sleep and something warm-blooded to eat. Given the forested expanse that is East Gippsland, there is no shortage of tree hollows and rocky areas for quolls to 'den up' (sleep). Increasing possum and bandicoot numbers will present an opportunity for this no-nonsense night stalker to take advantage of.

Will quolls increase in number once foxes have been reduced? At this stage the answer is uncertain, but it stands to reason that fewer foxes and more prey should benefit the quoll population.

THE SOOTY OWL

A truly opportunistic hunter, this owl has large, strong talons and hunts and lives in tall forests. While they currently prey heavily on arboreal species such as possums, a recent study has shown that prior to the arrival of the fox this winged hunting ground-dwelling prey, which included Southern Brown Bandicoots and native Bush Rats.



Southern Brown Bandicoot
DSE/McCann



Long-nosed Potoroo
DSE/McCann



Common Brushtail Possum
DSE/McCann

Will Sooty Owls start to prey on bandicoots and young potoroos once they become abundant again, following the decline of foxes? Like most of our native predators, they will hunt the most abundant prey, and if the ground-dwelling species become common again, it seems likely that Sooty Owls will start to hunt them.