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Impacts of Visitor Feeding of Birds at Grants Picnic Ground

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Poster Presentation P66

IMPACTS OF VISITOR FEEDING OF BIRDS AT GRANTS PICNIC GROUND

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Feeding of birds at Grants Picnic Ground (GPG) in Dandenong Ranges National Park has been occurring for many years, and is part of a lease agreement that lasts until 2019. The main birds that are fed at the site include Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, Crimson Rosellas, Galahs, Long-billed Corellas, and Australian King Parrots. To understand the impacts feeding was having at the picnic ground, I conducted a study from 14 April to 11 May, 2006. One aspect of this study included observations of the site itself, the vegetation at the site, visitor numbers, use of, and behavior at the site, and bird numbers, aggression, and behavior. I gathered this data by spending 108 hours at the site counting birds and visitors, aggressive acts, unusual behavior by birds or visitors, trip-mapping, and noting the condition of the site and vegetation. In order to understand why visitors were coming to the site, what they were doing, why they were feeding the birds, and what they knew about feeding the birds, I conducted a survey from 22 April to 3 May, 2006. The final aspect of my project was interviews with DRNP staff, avian specialists, and local residents. Staff interviews allowed me to determine their thoughts on the issue and how they thought the site should be managed. The avian specialists provided insight into normal bird population behavior and health. Talking to local residents helped me understand the community perspective on the issue.

Through my research, I concluded that the bird population at GPG is inflated due to feeding, most likely has diseases, and is dependent on visitor feeding, which results in an increased level of aggression in the birds. There is defoliation of tree ferns, shrubs, and trees as a result of the large bird population, as well as damage to wooden structures at the site (including the deck of the kiosk located there). There is insufficient signage on guidelines, regulations, and facilities, in addition to inadequate sanitizing opportunities. Most people visit GPG to feed the birds, and although many people are aware of some of the problems and risks associated with feeding birds, many are unclear on the park regulations. Many local residents are very dissatisfied with the current situation because of the damage to their property, noise of the birds, health risks, and threat to Superb Lyrebirds. These findings indicate that there are a number of improvements that can be made in the management of feeding at GPG. Most importantly, this would help reduce the risk of disease transmission and increase the health of the birds. Through this research, I have made a number of suggestions on ways feeding at GPG could be modified to lessen the impacts.