

Wednesday 12 March 2014

Leadbeater's Possum found on site harvested in 1980s

A Leadbeater's Possum has been found in an area which underwent timber harvesting near Healesville in the late 1980s.

Local community members recently provided footage to VicForests showing Victoria's faunal emblem emerging from an older, habitat tree located in 26 year old timber harvesting regrowth. The tree was retained during harvesting operations in Toolangi State forest.

VicForests Forest Scientist, Michael Ryan, said this and similar detections in other areas previously harvested show the system of retaining trees during harvesting can provide habitat over time for a range of species, including the Leadbeater's Possum.

"This detection highlights that harvested areas which contain suitable habitat trees have the potential to provide habitat for native species such as the Leadbeater's Possum," Mr Ryan said.

"The Leadbeater's Possum requires a mix of large, old nest trees, coupled with a dense cover of wattle as a food source.

"The combination of older trees retained during harvesting operations and wattle coming through as the forest re-grows can provide suitable habitat conditions, and complement the habitat found in National Parks and other areas in reserve.

"We retain habitat trees as part of all our operations and regenerate these areas after harvesting to ensure the forest re-establishes.

"The site of this detection will now be buffered by 100 metres* to ensure it is not disturbed by future timber harvesting operations," he said.

Mr Ryan said that VicForests are keen to know about any known colonies of Leadbeater's Possum.

"We welcome information like this so it can be incorporated into the planning stage of our harvesting Operations," he said.

"VicForests executes a range of management strategies to protect this species, including the exclusion of potential Leadbeater's Possum habitat, where there are high concentrations of large old trees.

"In addition to excluding potential habitat, if a Leadbeater's Possum colony is confirmed within an area planned for harvest VicForests applies a buffer of at least 100 metres* around the colony.

"The Leadbeater's Possum are a territorial species, with colonies known to generally occupy an area of one to three hectares. The 100 metre* buffer applied to colonies converts to three hectares in area and ensures the detection site is adequately protected from any disturbance caused by harvesting," Mr Ryan said.

VicForests General Manager, Stakeholders and Planning, Nathan Trushell said: "We need to take a landscape approach to the recovery of Victoria's faunal emblem.

“We want to see the recovery of the Leadbeater’s Possum in conjunction sustainable timber industry and that is why we were a member of the Leadbeater’s Possum Advisory Group.

“We await the announcement from Minister’s Walsh and Ryan on the next steps and publication of the recommendations VicForests helped to develop. If there are changes we can make to help the recovery of the Possum while maintaining the sustainability of the timber industry, we will make them,” he said.

*** Further protection is now given to all known Leadbeater’s Possum colonies with 200 metre buffers applied to every site to protect an area of 12 hectares – four times the size of the average colony**