

CARING FOR NATURE

Swift Parrot Habitat

A planting guide



Parks and Wildlife Service Tasmania

DEPARTMENT of TOURISM, PARKS
HERITAGE and the ARTS

The threatened swift parrot only breeds in Tasmania. It nests in tree hollows, which only occur in large old trees. Swift parrots feed on the nectar of flowering eucalypt blossoms such as those of the blue gums and swamp gums.

Important Habitat

Areas with mature eucalypts, where nectar production is plentiful and reliable, are critical to the parrot's overall survival. Swift parrots also eat psyllids and lerps which are found on the surfaces of eucalypt leaves. Lerps are the sugary shelters of small scale insects called psyllids.

The loss of blue gums due to land clearance is the major threat to the swift parrot's long term survival. Protection and rehabilitation of all breeding and foraging habitat is essential for the conservation of the swift parrot and other species.

Where is the habitat?

During the breeding season swift parrots use a narrow near-coastal band of blue gums in southeast Tasmania. This habitat is mainly between Swansea and Dover including the Forestier and Tasman Peninsulas and Maria and Bruny Islands. Swift parrots also use small pockets of coastal blue gum between Four Mile Creek and Falmouth as well as St Helens and Binalong Bay.

How can I help?

Replanting habitat is a way you can help re-build or extend the habitat of the swift parrot. As a school or class you can, with the help of Tasmania's Parks and Wildlife Service or Landcare groups, identify appropriate sites for replanting. Read the following sections carefully and complete the checklist over the page to find out if you are in a suitable location to replant swift parrot habitat.



Tasmanian blue gums

The blue gum, *Eucalyptus globulus*, is a majestic native tree which occurs in fertile areas, mainly in eastern and southern Tasmania. Blue gums can quickly reach heights in excess of 40 m.

With large, spreading roots and potentially dangerous falling limbs, blue gums are not suitable species for residential gardens, urban parks or school yards.

The understorey

The understorey is the layer of vegetation beneath the canopy. It is often forgotten when revegetating a site. Shrubs, grasses, mosses, ferns, herbs and climbers are all part of the understorey. Consider propagating and planting associated local understorey plants when planning your project - the result will be a healthier, self-sustaining habitat.

Why local seeds?

Collecting seeds from local native species is an important part of replanting habitat. Local seed is best adapted to the site, has a greater chance of survival, helps to prevent the introduction of disease and maintains the genetic integrity of the species. A set of ethics governs how you should collect seed:

1. Always ask the permission of landowners before you collect any seed.
2. Always collect less than one quarter of the total seed production of an area or from a single plant - aim to collect a few seeds from fifty individuals.
3. Obtain permission from the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service to collect seed from a reserve or from threatened species.
4. Never collect seed from young plants or where the plant population is sparse.
5. Minimise damage to plants by using clean, sharp secateurs.

Many people believe that replanting should only occur in areas where blue gum vegetation previously existed. It is thought that planting out of range could disrupt the migration route of species like the swift parrot.

Where to start?

Check off the list of requirements below to follow these planting steps:

Have you contacted the organisations below for advice and assistance in identifying a site? Is the chosen site one where blue gums once existed or swift parrots foraged or bred?

Do you have the resources (planting containers, potting mix, space, mulch, tree guards) and commitment (time to water seedlings daily, on-going maintenance) to carry out a replanting project?

Is the site away from power lines, large groups of people or residences? (Planting in some school grounds and suburban yards is not advised).

Have you located a stable, local plant community suitable for seed collection?

Are you familiar with the best times to collect seed? (Usually after summer for eucalypts). Contact the organisations listed on this page for more information.

Step by step planting:

1. Collect local native seed

You will need to find out what seeds look like and the best time to collect them. Seeds may be in pods like wattle seeds, or in gumnuts like eucalyptus seeds. Store seeds in paper bags or envelopes (not plastic bags). Label them with the date (some seeds last longer than others), location (describe the site so you can replant them in similar conditions - wet or dry, northern or southern aspect), and name the plant (if you don't know, sticky tape a leaf and flower or fruit on the bag and identify it later). Place the bags in a warm place like a window sill in the sun. The heat helps release the tiny seeds from the gumnut or pod. Some seeds from wattles need boiling water poured over them to crack their seed cases. Banksias require a very hot oven to release seeds.

2. Sow and pot seeds

Fill the plastic seedling tubes (obtained from Greening Australia or the Understorey Network) with high quality soil. Sprinkle the seeds on top and cover them with a fine layer of soil or sand. Sit the tubes in a warm place and keep them moist. Some seedlings can take months to germinate while others show in a few days. (Persist with the slow germinators!) Put your seedlings in a bright airy position with partial shade and water daily.

3. Plant your seedlings

Plant your seedlings in a sunny location, clear of power lines and buildings. Provide your seedling with plenty of space - plant tree seedlings several metres apart. Firm the soil around your plant, but don't compact it. Mulch around the plant to restrict weed growth and conserve moisture. Water new plantings so that the soil settles around the roots. Don't stake your seedlings as this promotes weak growth.

4. Looking after your plants

Water ever second day for the first few weeks and then once a week. Use tree guards to protect your plants from wind and animals.

Suggested species for replanting:

Dry Forests

Acacia verticillata (prickly Moses)
Dodonaea viscosa (native hop)
Cassinia aculeata (dolly bush)
Pultanaea juniperina (prickly beauty)
Allocasuarina verticillata (sheoak)
Tetralochea pilosa (black-eyed susan)
Bursaria spinosa (prickly box)
Banksia marginata (silver banksia)
Daviesia ulicifolia (native gorse)
Themeda triandra (kangaroo grass)
Danthonia species (wallaby grass)
Aotus ericoides (golden pea)
Lomatia tinctoria (guitar plant)
Diplarrena moraea (butterfly iris)
Lomandra longifolia (sagg)

Wet Forests

Bedfordia salicina (blanket leaf)
Coprosma quadrifida (native currant)
Olearia argophylla (musk)
Olearia phlogopappa (daisy bush)
Acacia dealbata (silver wattle)
Acacia melanoxylon (blackwood)
Acacia verniciflua (varnished wattle)
Pittosporum bicolor (tallow-wood)
Callistemon pallidus (bottlebrush)
Phebalium squameum (lancewood)
Pomaderris apetala (dogwood)
Goodenia ovata (parrot food)

Contact

Biodiversity Conservation Branch

134 Macquarie Street, Hobart. 7000
Phone: (03) 6233 6556 Fax: (03) 6233 3477

The Understorey Network

298 Patersonia Road Nuamara TAS 7259
Phone: (03) 6399 3420

Greening Australia

GPO Box 9869 Hobart TAS 7001
Phone: (03) 6223 6377

Threatened Species Network

C/-Tasmanian Environment Centre
102 Bathurst Street, Hobart. 7000
Phone: (03) 6231 2760

FURTHER INFORMATION

Head Office: 134 Macquarie Street Hobart TAS 7000
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