Australian National University

PUBLIC SEMINAR

Breeding biology & life history of the endangered swift parrot

Wednesday 25 September 2013 1-2pm

Dejan Stojanovic , FSES

Fenner Seminar Room, Building 141, Linnaeus Way, ANU

Anthropogenic habitat change can have serious effects on the viability of animal populations, but some species are more vulnerable than others. I studied the breeding biology of the poorly understood, endangered swift parrot Lathamus discolor. Swift parrots are vulnerable to anthropogenic change because their life history traits (tree cavity nesting, migration and predator naivety) expose them to a wide range of threats. Using intensive field survey techniques, I monitored swift parrot nests across their entire potential Tasmanian breeding range. I found that swift parrots have specific habitat preferences: they only used a rare subset of the tree cavities available to them for nesting. The benefits of moving between patches of suitable habitat were negated when they settled in areas occupied by introduced sugar gliders Petaurus breviceps, which predate on female swift parrots and their eggs. When food availability lured swift parrots into sugar glider infested areas, rather than to predator-free islands, the predation penalty was severe. These conditions may create an ecological trap, where habitat selection cues (i.e. food availability) become maladaptive. I propose that in forests degraded by anthropogenic habitat loss and sugar gliders, swift parrot populations are limited by more complex processes than for sedentary or philopatric species. The conservation problems faced by swift parrots highlight that complex, unexpected and synergistic interactions can be revealed for difficult-to-study species by undertaking detailed field research.

Dejan Stojanovic is a conservation biologist with a strong interest in birds. He has worked on species conservation projects in Australia and internationally, with a particular focus on threatened parrots and migratory shorebirds. He has been undertaking a PhD in the Fenner School of Environment and Society. This is his PhD completion seminar.

Presented by

Fenner School of Environment & Society
ANU College of Medicine, Biology & Environment

Enquiries
E jane.catford@anu.edu.au T 6125 2286
E david.salt@anu.edu.au T 6125 9286
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