



# Leadbeater's Possum Detection Report

**VicForests logging coupe: 344-520-0007**

**Boundary Road, Yarra Tributaries Forest Reserve**

**Report on the detection of a Leadbeater's Possum (*Gymnobelideus leadbeateri*) (LbP) via the use of a remote motion-sensing camera trap, within VicForests scheduled logging coupe 344-520-0007.**

## **Abstract**

A remote motion-sensing camera trap was set up within VicForests logging coupe 344-520-0007 to assess the presence/absence of the critically endangered Leadbeater's Possum (LbP). Across various evenings, the LbP was detected on the remote motion-sensing camera trap during this survey. This investigation concludes that VicForests have scheduled logging operations on the 2020 Timber Release Plan (TRP), in an area occupied by the LbP. We conclude that a 200m special protection zone (SPZ) buffer must be established within the area to ensure VicForests cannot destroy critical threatened species habitat. The methodology employed, the results of the investigation and the report's conclusions and recommendations are detailed below.

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**Dates of investigation:** 10/11/2020 – 30/12/2020

**Date of report:** 31/01/2021

## Introduction

In 2015, under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act), the conservation status of the LbP was uplisted from the endangered category to the critically endangered category. Within the *Leadbeater's Possum Conservation Advice 2015* document<sup>1</sup> it states that one of the primary threats to the species is 'habitat loss and ongoing deterioration of habitat quality', it then states that this continues to occur through a number of causes including 'Loss through harvesting and lack of quality in regrowth forests'.

VicForests scheduled logging coupe 344-520-0007 is listed on VicForests 2020 Timber Release Plan. It is located directly adjacent the Yarra Ranges National Park along Boundary Road within the Yarra Tributaries Forest Reserve. The forest around Boundary and Whitelaw tracks have seen many LbP detections over the past few years through the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning's (DELWP's) pre-logging surveys. At the time of this report, no pre-logging surveys have been undertaken within logging coupe 344-520-0007.

### Location overview

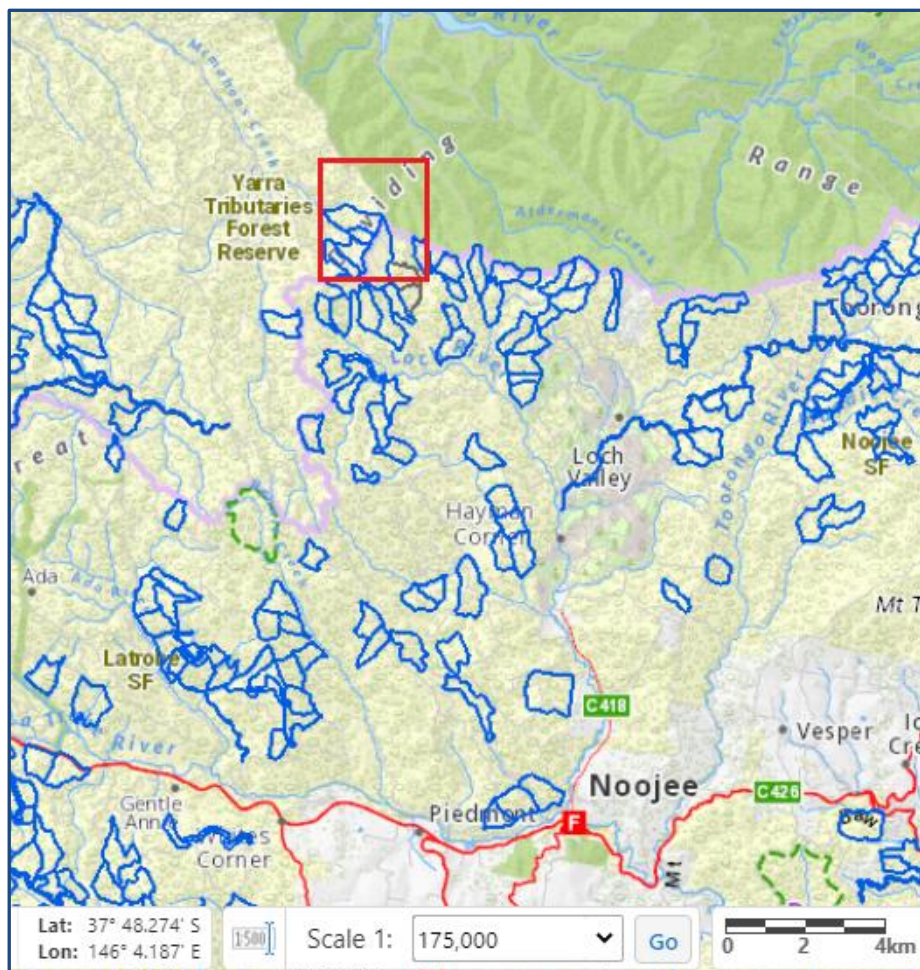


Figure 1 – Map showing the location of the LbP detection site (red box), with VicForests 2020 Timber Release Plan (various blue shapes). Source: screenshot from DELWP's 'Forest Information Portal' < [\*Forest Information Portal \(ffm.vic.gov.au\)\*](http://Forest Information Portal (ffm.vic.gov.au))>, accessed on the 16<sup>th</sup> of January 2021.

<sup>1</sup> [\*Conservation Advice Gymnobelideus leadbeateri Leadbeater's possum \(environment.gov.au\)\*](http://Conservation Advice Gymnobelideus leadbeateri Leadbeater's possum (environment.gov.au))

## Method

WOTCH assessed the habitat quality within coupe 344-520-0007 and found large patches of forest to be suitable habitat for the critically endangered LbP. The abundance of wattle (*Acacia spp.*), mid-storey connectivity and the presence of hollow-bearing trees (live and dead) provides vital habitat for the LbP in the area. Following the assessment, WOTCH deployed a remote motion-sensing camera trap within coupe 344-520-0007, this was done using the following methods:

- A remote motion-sensing camera trap was deployed at a height of approximately 2 meters in a Blackwood Tree (*Acacia melanoxylon*) to detect motion and changes in temperature and photograph any LbP foraging or moving through the forest mid-story.
- The camera was deployed on the 10<sup>th</sup> of November 2020 at approximate location coordinates 55 H 0406571 5820547 (UTM/Zone 55 H) and remained in that location until retrieved on the 30<sup>th</sup> of December 2020.
- A baiting station, primarily consisting of PVC piping, was filled with creamed honey then installed opposite the remote motion-sensing camera.
- A digital camera and GPS unit were used to capture video footage of the remote motion-sensing camera position facing the bait station and its location coordinates.

## Results

Summary: The results below include some of the photographs captured of the LbP from the camera trap, and a detection map of the LbP detection location within coupe 344-520-007. Attached within the email submission of this report is a zip folder of all the photographs captured of the LbP from the camera trap, as well as a video of the camera trap setup with location coordinates.

### Results 1. Photographs



Figure 2: Still image of a LbP captured from the remote motion-sensing camera trap on the 16<sup>th</sup> of November 2020 at approximate location coordinates 55 H 0406571 5820547 (UTM/Zone 55 H).



Figure 3: Still image of a LbP captured from the remote motion-sensing camera on the 16<sup>th</sup> of November 2020 at approximate location coordinates 55 H 0406571 5820547 (UTM/Zone 55 H).



Figure 4: Still image of a LbP captured from the remote motion-sensing camera on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November 2020 at approximate location coordinates 55 H 0406571 5820547 (UTM/Zone 55 H).



Figure 5: Still image of a LbP captured from the remote motion-sensing camera on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November 2020 at approximate location coordinates 55 H 0406571 5820547 (UTM/Zone 55 H).



Figure 6: Still image of a LbP captured from the remote motion-sensing camera on the 26<sup>th</sup> of November 2020 at approximate location coordinates 55 H 0406571 5820547 (UTM/Zone 55 H).



Figure 7: Still image of the bait station setup during daylight hours at approximate location coordinates 55 H 0406571 5820547 (UTM/Zone 55 H).



Figure 8: Screenshot of GPS location coordinates taken from the video recording of the investigation site.

## Results 2. Detection map

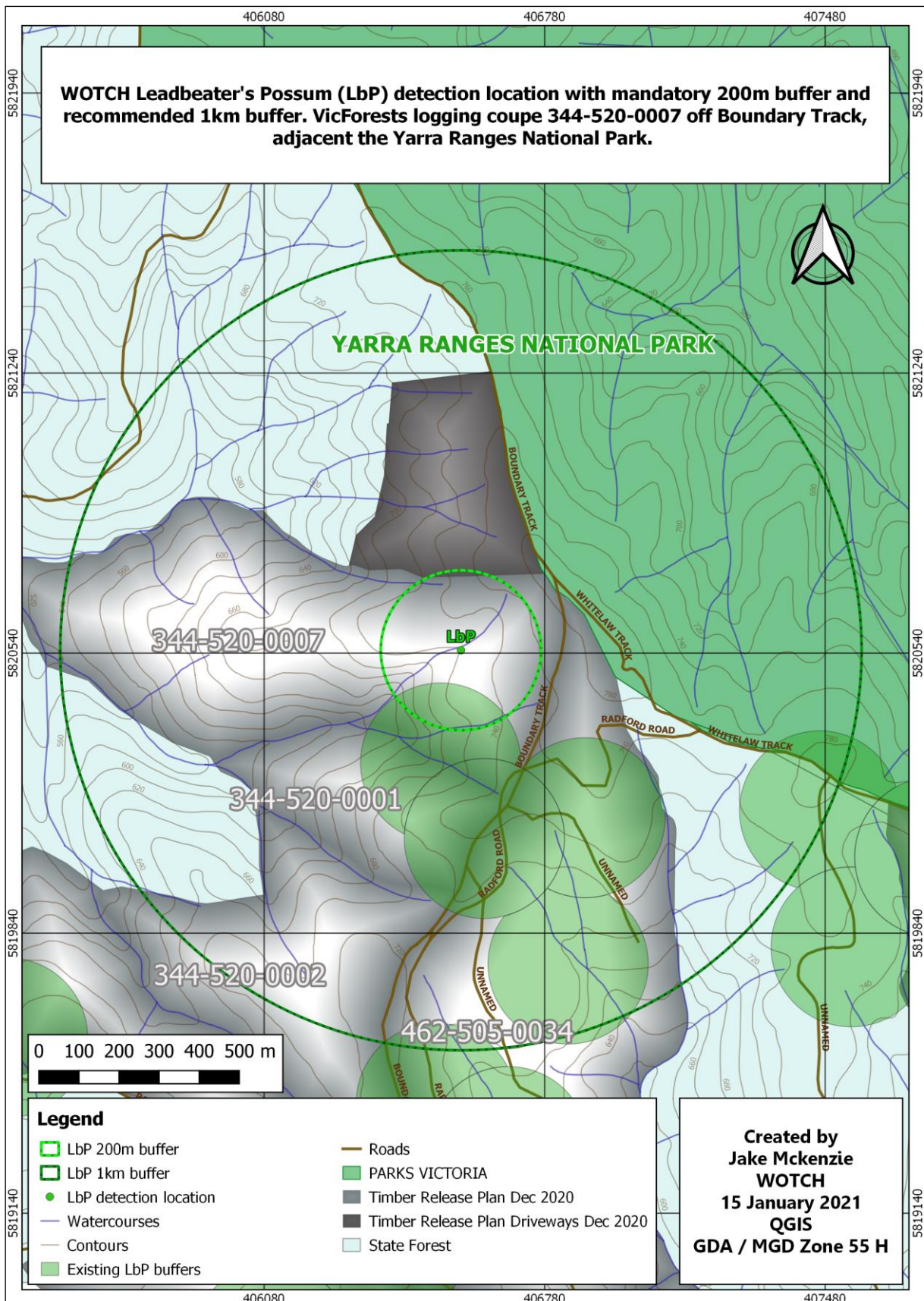


Figure 9: Map of LbP detection location within VicForests logging coupe 344-520-0007 with mandatory 200m buffer and recommended 1km buffer.

## Discussion

### Recommended prescriptions

The following prescriptions relevant to this report were recommended by David Lindenmayer, David Blair, Lachlan McBurney and Sam Banks from the Australian National University in their paper produced in July 2013, *New Restoration Forest Management Prescriptions to conserve Leadbeater's Possum and Rebuild the cover of Ecologically Mature Forest in the Central Highlands of Victoria*:

#### **Prescription 2 – Protection of recorded locations**

2.1 All locations where Leadbeater's Possum has been recorded present in the past 15 years will be protected by a 1 km buffer from which logging (both clearfell and thinnings) is excluded.

#### **Prescription 3 – Protection of Hollow-bearing Trees**

3.1 Each hollow-bearing tree (whether living or dead) will be surrounded by a buffer of unlogged forest measuring 100 m in radius.

3.3 All trees 100 or more years old should be protected and surrounded by a buffer of unlogged forest measuring 100 m in radius.

#### **Prescription 5 – Protection of Streamside Buffers**

5.1.1 Streamside buffers will be widened to a minimum of 100 m either side of a stream, whether permanent or temporary/seasonal.

### Mandatory prescriptions

It is mandatory for VicForests, the Department of Environment, Land Water and Planning and any other organisations undertaking timber harvesting operations in state forest of Victoria to comply with all prescriptions outlined in the Code of Practice for Timber Production 2014 (the Code).

Figure 10 below shows prescriptions in the *Planning Standards for timber harvesting operations in Victoria's State Forests 2014*, a document in the Code that must be enforced by DELWP, following the detection of a LbP.

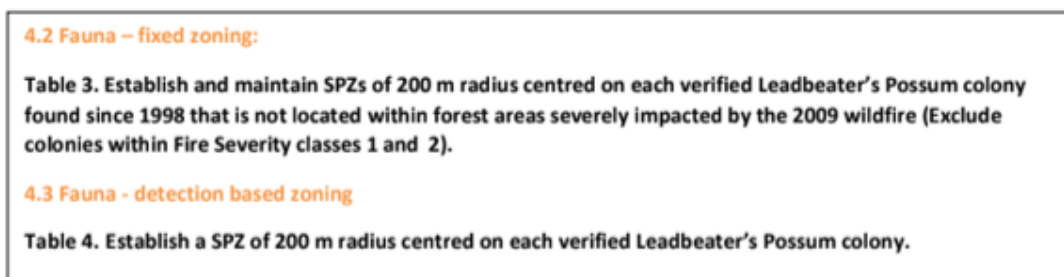


Figure 10: excerpt from page 20 of the Planning Standards, under subheading 'Table 3 Fixed FMZ rules for fauna'.



## Conclusion

This investigation has revealed that VicForests has scheduled clearfell logging operations in habitat for critically endangered LbP. Further management actions must be implemented by VicForests and DELWP to protect it.

DELWP, as a minimum, must enforce the indicative 200m Special Protection Zone buffers around the LbP detection location in this report. However, to best support this population of LbP, DELWP should enforce a 1km buffer around the detection and remove the coupe from the Timber Release Plan.

## Recommendations

1. DELWP must refrain VicForests from commencing forestry operations within scheduled logging coupe 344-520-0007 that fall within the prescribed 200m Special Protection Zone around the detection as seen in Figure 9.
2. VicForests and DELWP should adhere to the relevant scientific advice for the species and establish a 1km LbP buffer around the detection as seen in Figure 9.
3. Further comprehensive surveys should be undertaken throughout the entirety of this and nearby coupes to determine other locations where LbP's may be present.
4. The coupe should be removed from the Timber Release Plan as this area contains important habitat for the critically endangered LbP.



We respectfully acknowledge the Taungurung, Wurundjeri and Gunaikurnai Elders past, present and emerging, the Traditional Custodians who have never ceded ownership of the land on which we live, travel, work and play.