Story

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The sounds of the forest post wildfire

The remnants of the 2018/2019 Riveaux Road bushfire still live on, however a drive through Tasmania's southern forests truly shows that life is making its way back into the forests.

Amongst the striking green of epicormic growth on the standing eucalypts, a naked eye can just see the flutter of birds and insects as they navigate their way upon their return to a very different 'home'.

This year, Sustainable Timber Tasmania is continuing work with local ornithologist Andrew Hingston to monitor the response of native birds to the bushfire. The work is being completed as part of the Acoustic Monitoring Project, a collaborative research project on native bird diversity between the University of Tasmania and Sustainable Timber Tasmania.

Birds are extraordinary indicators of ecosystem health and diversity. Since 2017, Sustainable Timber Tasmania has been monitoring native bird diversity in the reserves and retained areas of wet mature eucalypt forest on Permanent Timber Production Zone (PTPZ) land.

The summer of 2019 saw extensive areas of the southern forest impacted by bushfire, with areas of forest severely burnt and only just recovering, grading into other areas lightly scorched or completely unburnt.

For STT's Acoustic Monitoring Project Team, this is a unique opportunity to compare and assess the response of birds to the effect of fire in these production forests. The data collected will be compared to similar data previously surveyed in this area in 2010 by Andrew Hingston as part of another biodiversity research project.

Sustainable Timber Tasmania continues to monitor and record the sounds of Tasmania's forests with bioacoustic technology and traditional ornithological survey methods.

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These methods can record bird calls at sunrise, during the day, sunset and through the night, and provide the ability to verify this data with actual field surveys.

Researchers from the University of Tasmania have already used this combined data to develop machine learning bird call classifiers, where species can be accurately recognised based on their recorded calls.

So far, the results of this research are extremely positive. Together, the new technology and STT's approach are providing an efficient method for monitoring key conservation species and detecting population trends over time.

Overall, these will be important datasets that contribute to our monitoring of the health and changes in species presence and composition through space and time in relation to production native forestry and wildfire.