

**CARNABY'S BLACK COCKATOO
RECOVERY TEAM**

Annual Report

2003

by

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for the Carnaby's Black Cockatoo Recovery Team

Introduction

The Team met twice during the year, in July and December.

Two additions to the Recovery Team were made during the year. These were: Dr Bob Humphries, Manager of the Water Corporation's Environment Branch, in recognition of the importance of liaison between the Recovery Team and the Water Corporation's Cockatoo Care project; and Dr Stephen Davies, currently engaged in several projects with landowners and local groups for the recovery of Carnaby's Black Cockatoo.

Current membership of the Recovery Team is:

- John Blyth, DCLM (WATSCU) chair;
- Raquel Carter; Threatened Species Network (WWF)
- Dr Stephen Davies, Curtin University;
- Alison Doley, 'Koobabbie', Coorow.
- Cheryl Gole; Birds Australia
- Neil Hamilton; DCLM (ex Perth Zoo)
- Dr Bob Humphries; Water Corporation (sub. Caroline Minton)
- Ron Johnstone, WA Museum;
- Kevin Marshall, DCLM (Geraldton District);
- Dr Peter Mawson, DCLM (Wildlife Branch);
- Adam Meyer, DCLM, (Moora District);
- David Mitchell, (DCLM Swan Region);
- Dr Denis Saunders, CSIRO (sub. John Ingram)
- (Leonie McMahon Project officer.)

The Carnaby's Black Cockatoo Recovery Plan was approved by the Director for Nature Conservation, the Conservation Commission and the minister for the Environment and Heritage during the year, and now formally guides the activities of the Recovery Team.

The Carnaby's Black Cockatoo Recovery Project, being implemented by the Project Officer Ms Leonie McMahon (employed by Birds Australia (WA) and using funds this year provided by the Natural Heritage Trust and Lotteries Commission) continued to provide a major thrust for implementation of recovery actions. Many other significant steps relevant to the recovery of Carnaby's Black Cockatoo were also taken.

Main Activities and Achievements of the Carnaby's Black Cockatoo Recovery Project

In 2003 the project focused particularly on recovery actions 5.1, involving identification and improved management of priority areas, 5.3, monitoring and 5.4, community involvement. However, the Recovery Team has also been involved with actions relating to 5.2, feeding habitat during the non-breeding season, and 5.5, captive breeding, as noted below.

Action 5.1.1: Identifying priority areas. A seventh priority breeding site, Calingiri-New Norcia, was identified by the Project Officer in 2003. There is considerable local interest at Calingiri, with the Calingiri/New Norcia Landcare group taking the cockatoo as their emblem and changing their name to 'Cockies for Landcare'. The Project Officer organised a Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo field day in conjunction with the landcare group in February 2003. As a result of the success of this field-day plans are being made to conduct other training days in other key sites.

In addition, a list of the sorts of information that could be gathered by Land for Wildlife officers that would be helpful for identifying key breeding and feeding areas for Carnaby's Black Cockatoos was distributed to Land for Wildlife officers.

Action 5.1.2: management of breeding habitat within priority areas. Emphasis is now on this action at all seven key breeding sites.

- Waddi Forest and Moora have considerable momentum, and have become more or less self-supporting. The Moora Council have adopted a Moora Carnaby's Black Cockatoo Plan and are seeking funding for the implementation of various activities that will raise awareness of the plight of the cockatoo and for some on-ground recovery actions such as revegetation.
- Work with individual cooperative landowners continued at both Walebing and Gillingarra and field days are planned to generate more local momentum.
- At Calingiri, several recovery actions for Carnaby's have been conducted, including incorporation of suitable plant species in suitable places as part of the group's participation in the Western Power Greening Challenge, a Landcare Drive and participation in a nesting box trial for Carnaby's Black Cockatoos funded by the Threatened Species Network. In February 2003 the Project Officer helped the group coordinate and conduct a training day in which CALM staff, including Land for Wildlife officers, were involved. Interest in the day was considerable with 34 participants, many of whom came from other key breeding sites.
- Nyabing/Katanning and Watheroo/Coomallo need more attention. At the former, many of the known nests are on land managed by DCLM and existing and potential feeding sites for birds using those nests needed to be identified. Watheroo/Coomallo remains difficult, with most nests on private property and little interest among most land holders. These two key breeding areas are now being given priority.

Guidelines regulating the culling of Galahs and Western Corellas specifically to assist endangered species have been developed by CALM. The control of Galahs and Western Corellas on "Koobabbie" (owned by Recovery Team member Alison Doley and her husband John) continues to be successful, with sporting shooters now adding significantly to the numbers taken per year. Successful nesting attempts by Carnaby's Black Cockatoos on Koobabbie appear to be increasing each year.

A very successful field day, attended by about 40 people, was held at "Koobabbie" in November and emphasised management of breeding sites and control of competing species. Work in the Katanning area is now becoming more active, with CALM Katanning organizing volunteers and other landholders and conservation professionals becoming involved.

The Project Officer was successful in obtaining a Community Conservation grant from the WA Minister for Environment to fund a team of Birds Australia volunteers to repair damaged nesting hollows at key breeding sites and to train interested landholders in the methods. This is important because the aging of hollow-bearing trees is causing attrition of useable hollows for Carnaby's Black Cockatoo throughout the wheat-belt.

Research by the WA Museum is showing that feral bees are likely to compete significantly with Carnaby's Black Cockatoos for nest hollows. Attempts to develop a program and funding proposal for research into, and the control of, feral bees are continuing. The Water Corporation is seeking funding to employ a project officer to develop a scoping document for the research and field trials that are likely to be necessary to develop a range of efficient and safe control strategies for feral bees.

Nest box trials are continuing on several properties in the northern agricultural area. They are part of a project funded by the Threatened Species Network.

Birds Australia and the Recovery Team continue to help write funding applications for landholders to implement works favourable to Carnaby's Black Cockatoos to bodies such as NHT2, Envirofund, Threatened Species Network and Lotteries Commission.

Departmental Wildlife Officers continue to conduct field surveys of known nesting sites during the breeding season to help minimise illegal poaching and have also been very helpful with surveys and contact with landowners in the northern areas.

Action 5.1.3: Management of feeding habitat within priority areas. The first requirement is the retention of existing feeding habitat. Much of this is on publicly-owned land managed by the Department, and ongoing management is being conducted to maintain the health of these habitats through dieback hygiene and appropriate fire management. In other areas the retention of feeding habitat involves the Project Officer and other members of the Recovery Team liaising with landholders and other organisations in which the land is vested.

The second element of managing feeding habitat is replacing such habitat where it has been lost, particularly from around key breeding sites. This is being pursued, with the continuing selection of sites to be targeted for re-vegetation to provide food close enough to key breeding sites. This information is being gathered with the help of farmers, local community members and volunteers.

Replanting efforts around key breeding sites are continuing, along with identifying and helping to find sources of species and seedlings that are favoured food plants for Carnaby's Black Cockatoos. The higher cost of several species of such plants, particularly Grevilleas and Dryandras, is a significant factor affecting the implementation of this action. The project officer is identifying nurseries that may be able to produce such species more cheaply or provide expert advice on the most effective germination and seed collection methods.

Action 5.2: Management of feeding habitat in non-breeding areas. Much of the work, particularly investigation of species and their availability for rehabilitation planting, being done in relation to the last action is also relevant to this one.

The Recovery Team is also involved in issues regarding potential or planned clearing around Metropolitan Perth of vegetation used as feeding habitat during the non-breeding season, as discussed below.

- **5.2.1: Native feeding habitat** The Swan Coastal Plain has long been a significant feeding area for large flocks of Carnaby's Black Cockatoos outside the breeding season. As development gradually spreads around Perth, and other regional centres, more and more of this habitat is being cleared, and the Carnaby's Black Cockatoo Project Officer receives an increasing number of enquiries from members of the public seeking advice on ways of protecting the species and its habitat. In addition, feeding habitat outside the breeding season is identified in the Recovery Plan as Critical Habitat for this species. This, and the status of Carnaby's Black Cockatoo as an Endangered species, is creating many enquiries from developers and their consultants about the requirements in relation to this species during planning and assessment of their projects. These matters are taking much time for the Project Officer and others on the Recovery Team and the Team has agreed to seek a more strategic approach to deal with them.
- **5.2.2: Non-native feeding habitat** The most important such habitats currently are the very large pine plantations over the Gnangara Mound. Now that an industrial plant has been established to use this timber, it is planned to remove most of these pines within about 20 years, to allow more rapid replenishment of the waters of the Gnangara Mound. Members of the Recovery Team are preparing an issues paper to

clarify what the possible effect of clearing the Gnangara pines may be on Carnaby's Black Cockatoo and how adverse effects could be avoided. A draft brief for the studies necessary to clarify management needs will also be prepared.

Action 5.3: Monitoring of populations has begun in a significant way, with landholders and other volunteers being trained in methods of counting nesting birds and several key sites being monitored regularly. Monitoring of active nesting hollows and searches for new hollows was carried out by Landholders, the Birds Australia project officer, Birds Australia WA volunteers, Volunteers local to the breeding site, DCLM staff (specifically staff of the Special investigations Unit and regional Wildlife officers).

Monitoring of active hollows took two forms:

- Tracking cockatoos to active hollows and observing breeding activity (female entering/exiting hollow, male feeding female, either parent feeding chick)
- Conducting nest searches of hollows that have a history of breeding activity, appear to be in use, or meet the requirements of Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo.

About 30 regular volunteers took part in surveys for Carnaby's Black Cockatoos, including surveys of use of feeding sites around key breeding sites. The surveys track birds from breeding sites to feeding sites and in the reverse direction. The value of this work will be enhanced even further when a large number of colour marked birds (see below) are in the various populations. The surveys are showing that during November, when adult birds are feeding chicks, many are feeding heavily on canola, usually when it has been swathed but also taken from the ground in harvested stubble, although they are also using native plants as food sources when they are readily available.

In order to be able to follow the movements of individual birds, a method of colour painting the white tail panels of birds prior to fledging was trialled in the 2003 breeding season. The tail was painted on each of twenty nine chicks from four different breeding areas in the northern wheatbelt (Coorow, Watheroo, Moora and Cataby). The colours used were red, orange, green and blue. These chicks and others checked during the same visits were also banded and biometric measures were taken from each one.

CALM receives 60 to 70 injured or derelict birds each year, and the opportunity exists to mark all of those that recover sufficiently to be released. The Project Officer is informing local communities about this project and is beginning to arrange volunteers for several key areas in which attempts will be made to follow the movements of marked birds. The focus will be on several key shires, including Moora, Coorow, Dandaragan and Wanneroo and the matter is being publicised in local newspapers and newsletters, the Birds Australia web site the Cockatoo Care web page, various DCLM publications and the Northern Agricultural Catchment Council e-letter.

Monitoring will incorporate the use of re-established feeding sites by breeding cockatoos.

Action 5.4: Community Involvement, producing publicity and education material about Carnaby's Black Cockatoo.

A number of significant achievements have been made this year in implementing this action.

First, a very successful Carnaby's Black Cockatoo 'Future Directions' Symposium was held in July and attended by over 100 people. It allowed much important information to be provided to many people interested in being involved in the recovery of this species, an opportunity for networking between all those interested people and many suggestions for the Recovery Team to consider.

Secondly, the Carnaby's Black Cockatoo Website has been established, with information about Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo and the recovery project at [http://birdswa.iinet.net.au/projects/Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo Recovery Project](http://birdswa.iinet.net.au/projects/Carnaby's%20Black-Cockatoo%20Recovery%20Project). The site is

linked to the Birds Australia WA site and through that to the very popular Cockatoo Care site managed by the Water Corporation.

Thirdly, the Project Officer arranged and attended the two field days designed specifically to encourage recovery actions for Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo. These were very successful and will be repeated in other important areas in future years.

The Project Officer was also involved in many other public awareness activities, as discussed below.

- At five agricultural shows (including Wagin Woolerama) attended by the Project Officer, the focus was on raising public awareness, providing information about recovery actions and seeking information about breeding sites.
- Presentations about the Carnaby's Black Cockatoo recovery project were made to two Landcare Groups, a Rotary Club and a Birds Australia Public Meeting
- From August 2002 through to July 2003 11 articles about the Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo Recovery project were written by the project officer and at least eight more were written by others about various activities related to the project. The articles were published in regional newspapers, community newsletters and special interest publications).
- Articles written by the project officer about the Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo Recovery Project appeared in the following publications:
 - Wingspan Vol. 13 No. 1 March 2003
 - Wingspan Vol. 13 No. 4 December 2003
 - Western Australian Bird Notes No 103 September 2002
 - Western Australian Bird Notes No 105 March 2003
 - Western Australian Bird Notes No 106 June 2003 (insert)
 - Central Midlands Advocate, September 2002
 - Central Midlands Advocate, July 10 2003
 - WATSNU Vol. 9 Issue 2, December 2002 (DCLM publication)
 - Volunteer Newsletter of the Threatened Bird Network, Issue 16 April 2003
 - Australian Journal of Landcare
 - Buntine-Marchagee Catchment News
- Articles written by others about activities related to the Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo Recovery Project appeared in:
 - Central Midlands Advocate, 21 November 2002
 - Countryman February 27 2003
 - Stirling Times, Tuesday 8 July 2003
 - The Australian, July 2003
 - Sunday Times, June 2003
 - The West Australian, Monday July 21 2003
 - WATSNU Vol. 10 Issue 1, June 2003 (DCLM publication)
 - Conservation News July 2003 (DCLM publication)
- Information sheets were provided when specific information was sought or thought likely to be welcomed. Information sheets were regularly amended to suit their particular audience. Frequently, monitoring sheets were provided on the back of an A4 sized information sheet about the cockatoo and the project.
- Cocky Notes 4, a six page newsletter that provides updates of the project and information about the cockatoo and recovery actions was produced and sent to people who have sent in records and/or are stakeholders. Since the very first Birds Australia project was carried out in 2000 a database of interested people has been kept and now numbers in excess of 800.

- All reports to funding bodies have been completed and forwarded on time.

Action 5: Captive-breeding program. CALM's Wildlife and Nature Protection Branches remain responsible for the delivery of Carnaby's Black Cockatoos from both the captive-breeding program and the rehabilitated birds program to licensed aviculturists or for release into the wild.

Other Activities aiding the Recovery of Carnaby's Black Cockatoo

Recovery Team member Ron Johnstone of the WA Museum continues to employ a field ornithologist to conduct or assist in surveys of south western cockatoos. The Project is funded by the Water Corporation's Cockatoo Care program. These surveys have located a number of new breeding sites for Carnaby's Black Cockatoos, including about ten on the Swan Coastal Plain. This survey work is suggesting that over the last few tens of years Carnaby's Black Cockatoo has shifted its centre of distribution from the wheat-belt to much further west.

New Recovery Team member Dr Stephen Davies conducts several activities in relation to Carnaby's Black Cockatoos. These include the establishment of 42 nest boxes at seven sites where the boxes are being erected by farmers and monitoring is yet to begin, and assistance to local groups and landholders in monitoring and in planning replanting of food plants for Carnaby's Black Cockatoo.

Conclusion

2003 has been an extremely active and successful year for the Carnaby's Black Cockatoo Recovery Team. The species continues to meet IUCN criteria for Endangered, but many positive things are being achieved to bring about a gradual improvement in its status.