

Cocky Notes

Issue 37: Spring 2023

KEEP CARNABY'S FLYING – NGOOLARKS FOREVER

Bec Donaldson
Murdoch University

In May, Birdlife Australia officially launched into a new community-powered initiative to help keep Carnaby's Cockatoos flying across Perth – with opportunities for everyone to get involved.

The project, Keep Carnaby's Flying – Ngoolarks Forever, is a partnership between some of WA's leading environmental NGOs, university research teams and Aboriginal organisations, working with four Perth-Peel councils per year to give our iconic, endangered black cockatoos a fighting chance of survival in the Perth-Peel region, where they are facing a major threat from insufficient habitat.



Project partners and supporters at the May launch of the Keep Carnaby's Flying – Ngoolarks Forever project at Zanthorrea native plant nursery, holding key Carnaby's Cockatoo food plants.

Photo: Murdoch University

The project is unique in translating science into on-ground community action, to give black cockatoos more food in urban and peri-urban areas. Birdlife's popular long-running citizen science surveys of black cockatoo roosts, the annual 'Great Cocky Count', alongside Murdoch University's innovative tracking of flocks using GPS and ARGOS satellite tags on 'marker birds, have identified roosting and foraging areas across Perth where it is important to give black cockatoos more habitat.

While the project's flagships are Carnaby's Cockatoos (given their status as urban wildlife), the project will benefit WA's threatened Forest Red-tailed Black Cockatoos and critically endangered Baudin's Cockatoos too.



Several native plant nurseries are participating in the project. We are providing these nurseries with large signs to help people identify which plants are the best healthy food sources for black cockatoos.

Photo: Merryn Pryor

For the project's launch in May, the keepcarnabysflying.org.au website went live. The website offers information about what everyone can do to help safeguard black cockatoos in their suburb, including environmental volunteer opportunities or creating a "Carnaby's cafe" by planting the birds' favourite foods in their garden, school or workplace. The website explores some of the science behind the project, and the cultural significance of black cockatoos to Noongar people. Visit the site for details!

When the cooler weather of Winter arrived, the project's larger-scale community-led planting also went into full swing across selected Perth council areas, with the planting of key food species including banksias, hakeas, macadamia, jarrah and marri. The councils where planting happened this year were City of Wanneroo, Shire of Serpentine-Jarrahdale, City of Melville and City of Cockburn.

Thousands of new trees and shrubs have already gone into the ground as seedlings and young trees; helping compensate for the ongoing 'net habitat loss' that is driving black cockatoos towards extinction. The revegetation activities are a collaboration between the councils and our project's environmental NGO partners: Perth NRM, SERCUL, Urban Bushland Council, Landcare SJ, Peel-Harvey Catchment Council and Winjan Aboriginal Corporation; supported by passionate members of the public and Friends groups.



Native plants going into the ground during a project planting day at City of Cockburn.
Photo: Murdoch University

The project's other partners include black cockatoo rehabilitation experts Kaarakin Black Cockatoo Conservation Centre; Murdoch University's Ngank Yira Institute for Change and Harry Butler Institute; and Curtin University's TrEnD laboratory, which is collecting scats from under Carnaby's cockatoo roosts and using cutting-edge environmental DNA (eDNA) techniques to identify what the birds at that roost are feeding on.

We are also collaborating with DBCA, Perth Zoo and the Town of Victoria Park. In another exciting first for R&D, the latter has developed the 'Cockitrough', a platform-based water station for black cockatoos and other birds. This has proved hugely popular and is being installed by councils and workplaces across Perth, to give their local flocks access to safe drinking water. Black cockatoos are at risk of heat stress and death from lack of water on hot days, especially with climate heating. They prefer drinking shallow water, and will drink from road pot-holes if there is no other option, leading to vehicle strike; so providing safe water is a life-saver. To discuss installing a Cockitrough, contact the Town of Victoria Park. There are also delightful photos on the Town's Cockitrough web page, showing black cockatoos embracing their new water source.

Keep Carnaby's Flying – Ngoolarks Forever is funded by Lotterywest. Our vision of a beautiful, shady urban environment, filled with native birds and trees, aligns with Lotterywest's priority of 'protected sustainable ecosystems', while our community-led revegetation activities fit with Lotterywest's other core priorities: 'inclusive thriving community' and 'active healthy people'.

The project's website will soon have additional pages, including resources to help councils safeguard black cockatoos in their suburbs, and fun, curriculum-aligned black cockatoo educational materials for schools and families.

Professor Kris Warren from Murdoch's black cockatoo research team, who initiated the project, explains its vision. "We hope these community and local government collaborations grow stronger every year, beyond the project's lifetime, with ongoing revegetation and rewilding activities to give ngoolarks the additional food that they need."

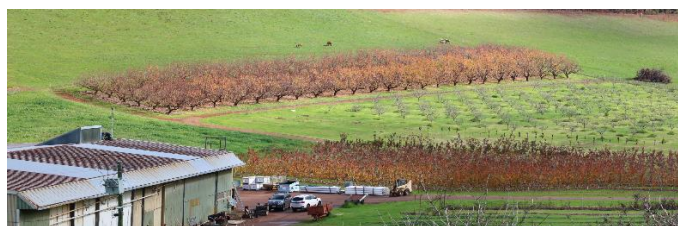
"We all want black cockatoos to survive. This means creating a 'Nature-positive Perth'; giving our much-loved birds more habitat, and protecting what is left. The community is concerned that black cockatoo declines haven't yet been halted; we hope this project is a way for people to help."

For more information about how to keep Carnaby's flying, visit keepcarnabysflying.org.au.

LASER DETERRENTS ON FARMS

Aline Gibson Vega
WA Black-Cockatoo Project Officer

In early June 2023, three laser bird deterrent systems were installed in orchards in Dwellingup. Why, you may be asking? The critically endangered Baudin's Black-Cockatoo are notorious for their love of pome and stone fruit. Frustrated orchardists have been trying to find non-lethal cost-effective solutions to deter the birds from their properties for decades. Current practices such as gas guns or netting fruit aren't long-term solutions as they are often expensive, labour intensive or noisy. In addition, birds often habituate to these deterring methods and continue feasting on the easy fruit food source. More recently, lasers have been proposed as a bird-friendly cost-effective alternative which triggers the bird's natural fight or flight response.



One of the orchards with the laser installed on the roof.
Photo: Aline Gibson Vega

With promising results in the eastern states of Australia, BirdLife Australia is interested in trialling this technology on Baudin's Black-Cockatoos. Earlier in June 2023, three laser deterrent systems were installed in orchards around Dwellingup. While the project is specifically interested in whether the green beam of light will keep Baudin's off the property, it may possibly work on other problem birds such as Australian Ringneck Parrots.



Australian Ringneck Parrots
Photo: Aline Gibson Vega

This project will validate whether the lasers are more effective at keeping the birds off the property compared to traditional methods by comparing the level of bird presence against nearby non-lasered sites.

Keeping these charismatic birds out of orchards could be a benefit to the conservation of the species. The Recovery Plan for Forest Black-Cockatoos, which includes the Baudin's and Forest Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo, states that finding cost-effective means to mitigate fruit damage – and hence keep birds off orchard properties – is key to their population recovery.



Setting up the lasers for operation.
Photo: Aline Gibson Vega

This initiative forms part of BirdLife Australia's *Communities working to help black-cockatoos* project, supported by the Alcoa Foundation.

HOLLOW SEARCH CALL OUT

Sam Rycken
Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo Coordinator

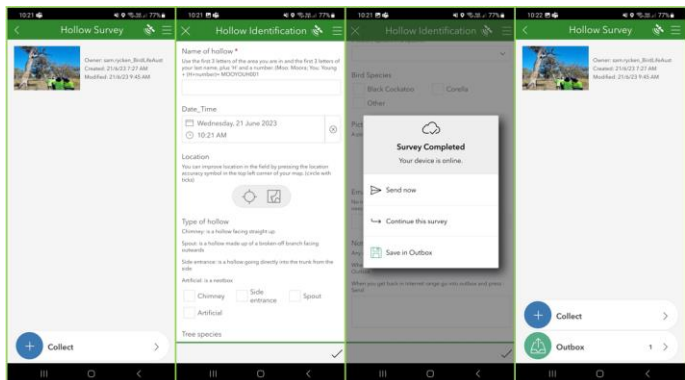
BirdLife WA is on the lookout for some excellent tree hollows that are of breeding size for black-cockatoos. As part of our breeding program, we are always interested in the location of new breeding sites for our endangered black-cockatoo species here in Western Australia. But we can't be everywhere at once and WA is a big place. That's why we need you! So the next time you are walking along in our beautiful southwestern forest and come across a hollow that might very well be a black-cockatoo hollow, let us know!



Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo looking out of her hollow.
Photo: Sam Rycken

I have set up a survey through an app called Survey 123 from ArcGIS. All you have to do is download Survey123 on your phone through your Google Store or Apple Store. You can then follow the link in this article (through the QR code or through the link) which will take you to the survey which can be opened in the app. Once you have downloaded the survey on your phone, you can open it at any given moment (even when offline) and fill in the survey when you discover a hollow. It even allows you to take a picture of the tree so we can easily find it again later on. When you complete the survey you save it in the outbox and when you are back in range of internet you can send the survey from the outbox. I will receive this information then and will know exactly where the hollow was seen and what it looks like.

We are still in need of hollow locations in the Southwest as we lack data in this region. This is becoming more and more important as we are seeing a lot of development in places like Margaret River and others, where hollow bearing trees might come under threat. In addition, if you see a tree hollow but it is being used by a corella, we still want to know about it for our invasive species project. As corellas are direct competitors with black-cockatoos for hollows this is also important information.



The hollow survey we use to gather locations of new breeding sites for black-cockatoos.
 Screenshot: BirdLife Australia

Link for Survey123 (Apple):

<https://apps.apple.com/us/app/arcgis-survey123/id993015031>

Link for Survey123 (Google Play):

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.esri.survey123&hl=en&gl=US>

Follow this link for the survey or use the QR code:

<https://survey123.arcgis.app?itemID=973c57bacca2498fa4d1907eca175e9b>



If you would like to participate and would like more information on the Hollow survey and how to conduct it, please feel free to get in touch with me: sam.rycken@birdlife.org.au

If you are interested in last year's breeding report for Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos, it is now available online. Click [here](#) to view.

KAARAKIN CARNABY'S BLACK-COCKATOO RELEASE UPDATE

Sam Clarke
 Kaarakin Black Cockatoo Conservation Centre

On Saturday June 24th, Kaarakin successfully released 20 Endangered Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos back into the wild for their second shot at freedom. They were released into a large roost site in the Perth Hills on a private property where currently a few hundred Carnaby's are roosting. They were released in the late afternoon as the wild flocks returned to a local water source before roosting in the surrounding trees. Our rehab cockatoos flew well together and integrated into the wild flock very well. Most of the cockatoos came into our care suffering from Carnaby Hindlimb Paralysis Syndrome (CHiPS), collisions with motor vehicles and a handful were juveniles that required careful hand-rearing. Some of these

juveniles have been at the Centre for over 18 months learning social skills, bonding with a new flock and learning how to efficiently eat native foods in order for a successful release back into the wild. So it was very rewarding to see them set free!



Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos in pet packs lined up and ready for release.

Photo: Kaarakin Black Cockatoo Conservation Centre

We are pleased to announce shortly after on Friday 14th of July we had another successful release! This time it was 13 Vulnerable Forest Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos at Churchman Brook Dam. Most of these had come in as results of motor vehicle collisions and raven attacks. Raven attacks remain our second highest injury (20-25% of rescues), where the ravens chase the red-tails and pull out their tail feathers, grounding them by inhibiting them from gaining any lift to fly. This threat continues to increase with increasing urbanisation and poor waste management resulting in increasing raven populations. One cockatoo was also the survivor of being illegally shot, but thanks to the hard work of our volunteers and staff is now enjoying her second shot at freedom!



A Forest Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo awaiting release in its pet pack.

Photo: Sam Clarke

GREAT COCKY COUNT UPDATE

Merryn Pryor
Black-Cockatoo Project Coordinator

Thank you to all the wonderful volunteers who generously gave their time to assist in counting black-cockatoos as they flew into their evening roost sites on Sunday 2nd April. Over 600 registered volunteers took part in the 2023 Great Cockey Count (GCC), though it is likely that up to one thousand people took part when taking into account friends and family. This enabled us to count 389 roost sites across the southwest from Chapman Valley to east of Esperance. The 2023 GCC marked the 13th year that the annual event has taken place since it began in 2010.

Overall, 257 of the 389 sites surveyed recorded black-cockatoos roosting, giving an occupancy rate of 66%. Of the 257 sites where black-cockatoos were observed roosting, 98 of these had White-tailed Black-Cockatoos (WTBCs) only roosting, 112 sites had Forest Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos (FRTBCs) only roosting and 47 sites had both White-tailed and Forest Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos roosting at the same site.

The total count for White-tailed Black-Cockatoos was 22,927 birds, with 13,140 birds recorded on the Perth-Peel Coastal Plain, 2,049 birds on the Northern Darling Scarp and Plateau and 7,738 birds observed in regional areas. The number of birds recorded roosting at individual roost sites ranged from 1 bird to 8,001 birds, with an average roost size of 158 birds. The 8,001 Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos observed roosting at the 'Mega Roost' in the Gnarra Pine Plantations accounted for 35% of the WTBCs recorded during the 2023 GCC and 61% of all WTBCs observed on the Perth-Peel Coastal Plain.

The total count for Forest Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos was 6,273 birds, with 3,353 birds recorded on the Perth-Peel Coastal Plain, 1,691 on the Northern Darling Scarp and Plateau and 1,229 birds observed in regional areas. The number of FRTBCs roosting at individual roost sites ranged from 1 bird to 593 individuals, with an average roost size of 39 birds. The total number of FRTBCs recorded was up by 300% on last year's count (2,066 birds), and on a par with the total counts from 2019 and 2021 (6,104 and 6,692 birds respectively). The low count in 2022 is thought to have been a result of the GCC coinciding with a bumper breeding season for the Forest Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos. Rather than the FRTBCs being at their usual non-breeding roost sites, they were likely in their breeding areas instead. It is not unusual for FRTBCs to be observed breeding in Autumn, as this species can breed at any time of year if resources are plentiful.

Thanks once again to all the wonderful volunteers who gave their time to help us count black-cockatoos. A full report on the count will be produced in due course. Now that the GCC has been running for 13 years BirdLife is also looking into conducting a review

of how we perform the analysis, given that the numbers of both volunteers participating and roost sites surveyed each year have remained steady for several years.

On another note, the GCC report from the last couple of years (2021 and 2022) is now available. We thank everyone for their patience in waiting for the report release – we ran into a few roadblocks over the last couple of years with staff turnover and capacity, software issues, scheduling delays and delays related to the legacy of covid. The report can be viewed [here](#).

The Great Cockey Count is supported by funding from the Alcoa Foundation.



Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos flying.
Photo: Keith Lightbody

COCKYWATCH UPDATE

Merryn Pryor
Black-Cockatoo Project Coordinator

With the holiday season fast approaching, now is a great time to get involved in our *CockyWatch* surveys.

CockyWatch, a citizen science road transect survey for black-cockatoos based on distance sampling methods, involves citizen scientists recording black-cockatoos seen as they drive through the landscape. The project was launched in 2018 with the aim to improve the accuracy of population size and density estimates and better understand annual and regional variation in population sizes and trends for all three threatened southwest black-cockatoo species over time.

Data analyses performed on 739 *CockyWatch* surveys submitted between November 2017 and October 2021 demonstrated the importance of the Jarrah Forest for all three species, that the largest numbers and highest densities of Carnaby's occur in the Jarrah Forest, Esperance Sandplains and Swan Coastal Plain and the restriction of Baudin's Black-Cockatoos to the Warren, Jarrah Forest and Swan Coastal Plain IBRA (Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation for Australia) regions.

While early results are encouraging, we still need a lot more surveys to obtain enough data to enable us to make robust population estimates. This is where you can help! Anybody in the Western Australia's southwest can participate in *CockyWatch*, anywhere from north of Kalbarri to east of Esperance. Surveys can be done at any time of year - all you need to do is be in transit on a drive of 20km or longer and you can conduct a *CockyWatch* survey. It's simple, fun

and a great way to keep travelling interesting while contributing to an important citizen science project.

Click [here](#) to learn how you can participate in *CockyWatch* and help us gather vital information on our threatened southwest black-cockatoos.

CockyWatch was developed in partnership with the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions and is currently supported by funding from the Alcoa Foundation.

SAVE THE DATE FOR THE 2024 GREAT COCKY COUNT!

The 2024 Great Cocky Count (GCC) will take place on the evening of **Sunday 14th April 2024**. Registrations will open on Monday 29th January and close on Sunday 14th March. We need your help to make this GCC bigger & better than ever!

Registrations will be available on our events page <https://birdlife.org.au/events/great-cocky-count/>

If you know of any areas where black-cockatoos roost overnight, please let us know at greatcockycount@birdlife.org.au so that we can include them in the 2024 GCC.

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HESPERIA
LINC + FINI



natural resource management program



Alcoa Foundation



Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions



lotterywest



Australian Government

HAD A CHANGE OF ROOST?

If you've changed email addresses, or if you don't want to receive Cocky Notes in the future, please let us know at wa@birdlife.org.au

THE COCKY CONSERVATION TEAM

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The Baudin's Black-Cockatoos have been loving the flowering bottlebrush around lately.
Photo: Keith Lightbody

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BirdLife Australia is dedicated to achieving outstanding conservation results for our native birds and their habitats.

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