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Agriculture Protection Board
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SULPHUR- CRESTED COCKATOO



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THE SULPHUR-CRESTED cockatoo (*Cacatua galerita*) is a native of eastern and northern Australia.

The range of the major race extends from Tasmania to Cape York and the Gulf of Carpentaria. A second sub-species is found across the north of Australia from Derby to the Gulf, and a third in New Guinea. Sulphur-crested cockatoos are declared animals south of the 26th parallel. There are restrictions on keeping them in W.A. Those which have become established in the wild must be destroyed.

Significance:

Sulphur-crested cockatoos cause considerable damage to grain, nut and fruit crops in eastern Australia. In particular, they dig up newly sown seeds and attack ripening grain crops, including wheat, sorghum and sweet corn. They are also known to attack grapes in vineyards, to chew the growing shoots from vines and to eat almonds. If they spread to the wheatbelt and other areas, they would cause considerable damage in W.A.

They are large, aggressive birds which would compete with the long-billed corella for food in W.A. and with other indigenous cockatoos such as the Major Mitchell, White-tailed and Red-tailed black and the Galah for nesting sites. All these species nest in hollows in dead and living trees. Suitable

nesting holes are scarce in many areas and are likely to become scarcer as old trees die and are not replaced.

Sulphur-crested cockatoos usually pair for life. They regularly return to the nesting site even outside their breeding season and will prevent the hole being used by other birds.

Food:

Sulphur-crested cockatoos live on grain, seeds, fruit, nuts, berries, flowers, leaf buds, insects and their larvae. They are of limited benefit to agriculture by eating weed seeds and insects but also cause considerable damage to newly sown and ripening crops. They may also attack haystacks and grain left out in paddocks in sacks.

Description:

Sulphur-crested cockatoos are large birds growing up to 50cm in length. Their plumage is mainly white with pale yellow bases to the feathers of the cheek and throat and a yellow forward-pointing crest. The undersides of the wing and flight feathers are also yellowish. The bill is large and dark grey in colour. The crest is normally flattened but may be raised during courting or territorial displays and when frightened.

Habits:

They are noisy conspicuous birds found in small groups during the breeding season but at other times in flocks of up to several hundred. When the flock is feeding on the

ground a few birds keep watch from nearby trees rising into the air screeching loudly at the approach of danger.

Each flock has its own roosting site which is used at night even when the flock is feeding in the daytime many kilometres away.

Breeding:

Sulphur-crested cockatoos breed from May to August in the north of W.A., from August to January in the south-east of Australia, and probably over the same period in the south-west.

Two or three eggs are laid on a bed of wood dust usually in a hollow limb high up in a tree, but also in cliffs and occasionally haystacks. Both sexes brood. Incubation takes about 30 days and the young leave the nest after six weeks.

If the small flocks which have become established in W.A. from aviary escapees were to increase in numbers and move into the wheat-belt, unacceptable damage would be done to grain crops. At the same time many native W.A. cockatoo species would suffer. It is essential that this is not allowed to happen.

All sightings of Sulphur-crested cockatoos should be reported to the Agriculture Protection Board, Jarrah Road, South Perth, W.A. Telephone (09) 367 0111 or any country office of the APB or the Department of Agriculture.