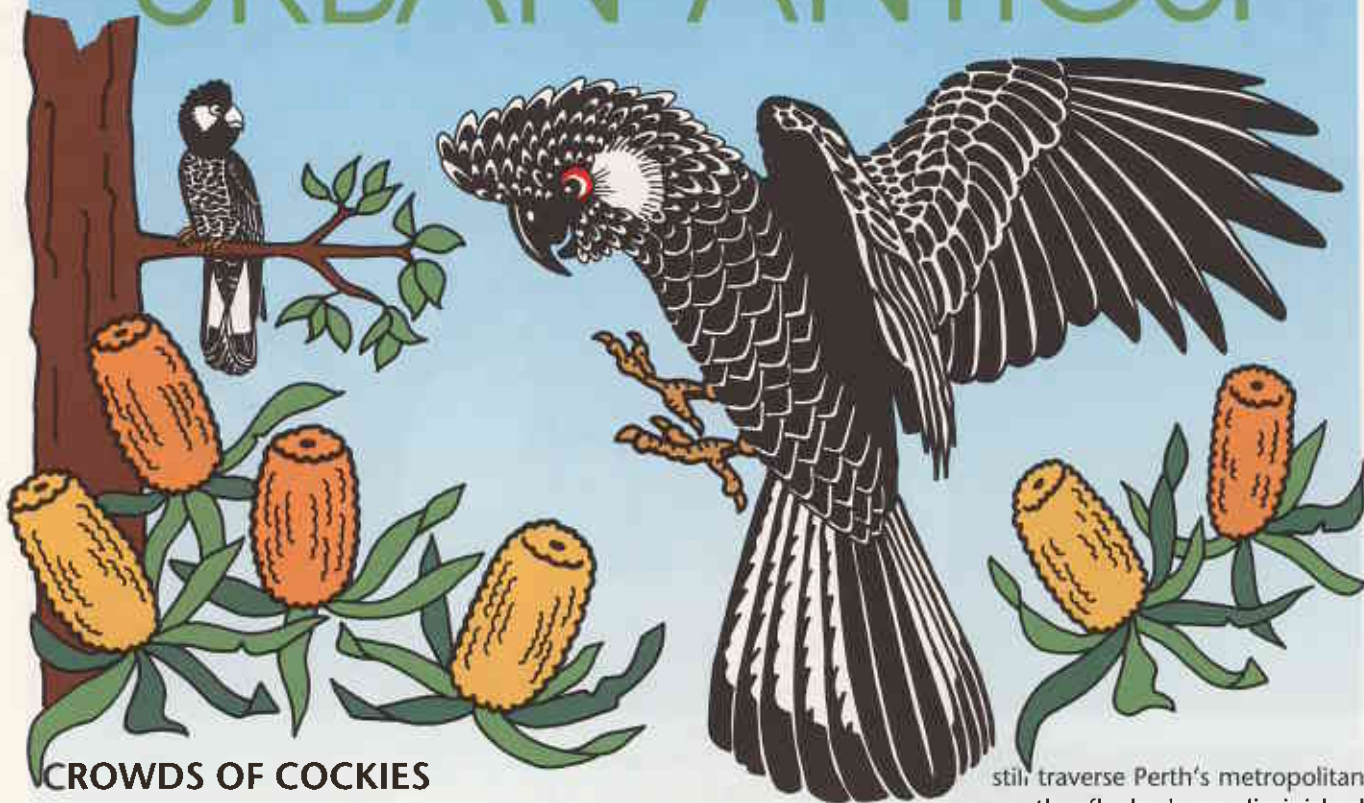


URBAN ANTICS!



CROWDS OF COCKIES

'Here come the cockies, son - it's going to rain.'

My dad used to say that in the autumn and winter every year during the forties, as wave after wave of white-tailed black cockatoos darkened the skies over our house. It always did seem to rain too (even though there is no scientific truth in the statement), but as a little 'un I was eager to believe him.

Often the wails and screeches of a thousand birds penetrated the surrounding bush and asbestos walls of our tiny Scarborough dwelling, obliterating all other sound. Then, like a bomber squadron, the whole flock would land in nearby tuart and banksia trees, spreading to dryandra thickets while cursing and tearing at seed pods and foliage.

There are two species of white-tailed black cockatoos in the South West of Western Australia, Baudin's cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus baudini*) and Carnaby's cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus latirostris*). They are similar in appearance, but Baudin's cockatoo has a longer bill and prefers the southern eucalypt forests, where it feeds mainly on the seeds and nectar of marri and banksia. Carnaby's cockatoo frequents the drier

woodlands and sandplain areas around Perth and to the north, mainly feeding on the small hard fruits of hakeas, grevilleas, banksias and dryandras.

In the metropolitan area from about January to June each year, flocks of this seemingly slow-flying, large, noisy bird forage for food in native vegetation and gardens. It is usually easy to see where a group has been by the mess of seedpods and foliage on the ground, especially under pines. At times gum nuts and pine cones rain down to damage vehicles or narrowly miss an observer's unprotected head.

Rain does seem to excite the birds, which probably look forward to a feed of fresh nectar and insect larvae under wet bark.

About July each year the cockatoos disperse to their usual breeding areas in the wandoo and salmon gum woodlands north and east of Perth. Here, each life-bonded pair raise one chick in a hollow-branch nest.

After 11 weeks of brooding, the fledgling and parents join other family groups and move to their coastal summer refuge. They congregate in flocks at plentiful food sources in and around the suburbs.

While white-tailed black cockatoos

still traverse Perth's metropolitan area, the flocks have diminished drastically both in size and numbers. This is due primarily to the rapid and extensive clearing of the birds' food trees and nest trees in agricultural areas. Today, like the dryandras and banksias they eat from, the white-tailed black cockatoos are but a remnant of past populations. Those small, feathery black clouds on the horizon are perhaps a storm-warning for another species heading towards extinction. Only time will tell.

JOHN HUNTER

Did You Know

White-tailed black cockatoos lay two eggs. The second nestling usually dies within two days of birth.

A reliable food source near the nest is vital. Brooding adults usually feed in line-of-sight vegetation. If this is fragmented and isolated, time may run out for a hungry nestling.

*The galah (*Cacatua roseicapilla*), an aggressive competitor for the cockatoos' nest sites, has increased in numbers. It breaks Carnaby's cockatoo eggs when the birds temporarily leave the nest.*

LANDSCOPE

VOLUME SEVEN NO. 1 SPRING EDITION 1991



A wave of colour is spreading from Shark Bay to Jurien and inland to Meekatharra. Our story on page 10 takes you into Wildflower Country.



The WA Museum is 100 years old. It houses a staggering four million specimens of insects, marine animals, fish, birds, reptiles and frogs. Page 22.



Seven species of microscopic dieback-disease fungi are attacking WA's unique wildflowers. See page 28.



The rugged Pilbara landscape has some hidden delights. On page 16, go up hill to Hamersley Range, then down Dales and other spectacular gorges.



How does WA's conservation heritage look to the people who look after it? Turn to page 26 for some great photographs from a recent competition run for CALM staff.

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COVER

Out now! Wildflowers are blooming in the vast tracts of country north of Perth, especially in the northern sandplains and Murchison, which is experiencing a bumper wildflower season following heavy winter rains. Philippa Nikulinsky's illustration shows some of the wildflowers for which WA is justly famous: the splendid everlasting, buttercup, red leschenaultia, Sturt's desert pea, catspaw, wattle, native wisteria, black kangaroo paw, flame pea, and scaevola - all covered in the newly released book Wildflower Country. See page 10.



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