

CARING FOR COCKATOOS

There are three species of large black cockatoo in south-western Australia—Baudin's black-cockatoo, Carnaby's black-cockatoo (both with white tails) and the forest red-tailed black-cockatoo. All are endemic to the region and are found throughout large areas of public land, including State forest, national parks and the Water Authority's drinking water catchments.

Carnaby's black-cockatoo occurs mainly in woodlands and scrubs of the Wheatbelt, but can also occur in the forest. The other two species are confined to the south-western forest block.

Numbers of all three species have declined greatly since European colonisation, due mainly to the clearing of forests and woodlands, shooting by orchardists, loss of hollows and competition for existing breeding hollows, especially from feral bees.

The red-tailed species is classified as near threatened, while the two white-tailed species are declared threatened. According to John Blyth—Acting Manager of the Department of Conservation and Land Management's WA Threatened Species and Communities Unit—all are in need of special care.

"Because all three range over such a large area, it really needs a cooperative approach to look after these birds," he said.

The department convenes a recovery team for Carnaby's black-cockatoo that includes its own specialists and those from the Western Australian Museum and Birds Australia, as well as interested members of the farming community.



As part of the recovery effort, Birds Australia has recently received funding from the Natural Heritage Trust for part of the recovery plan and Leonie McMahon has been appointed as project officer. Leonie believes that community awareness and participation in the identification and conservation of breeding sites is vital.

"We couldn't conserve this species successfully without the support we're getting from people throughout the Wheatbelt," she said.

A major gap in knowledge required for management of Baudin's black-cockatoo relates to the identification of breeding sites. The department has provided funding to the WA Museum to assist with this process, and the Museum's Ron Johnstone said finding nests of this bird was extremely difficult.

"This is partly because they tend to nest in very tall trees, but progress is being made and we're building up

a picture of their nesting requirements," he said.

The Water Corporation has joined forces with the Museum to assist the three cockatoo species in their fight for survival. The Cockatoo Care project aims to collect essential research data, install nesting boxes and control feral bees from the forest areas.

Ron Johnstone points out that 20 per cent of the Baudin's and the red-tail's nests monitored over the last five years had been lost to feral bees.

"For birds that use traditional nest sites, this must be having a major impact," he said.

People who would like to

Above left: Red-tailed black-cockatoo.

Above: Carnaby's black-cockatoo.

Photos – Babs & Bert Wells/Conservation and Land Management

become involved in the Water Corporation project, hear and see video footage of these species, download information, enter competitions or find out more about the project, should log on to www.cockatooocare.com.

Those who would like to help Leonie with recovery of Carnaby's black-cockatoo can contact her through the Birds Australia office on (08) 9383 7749, or by e-mail to ljmcmahon@yahoo.com.

Winner of the 1998 Alex Harris Medal for excellence in science and environment reporting.

LANDSCOPE



VOLUME SEVENTEEN, NUMBER 2, SUMMER 2001-2002

020432

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 Colour Separation by Colourbox Digital.
 Printed in Western Australia by Lamb Print.

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Published by the Department of Conservation and Land Management, Dick Perry Avenue, Kensington, Western Australia.

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Thirteen years in the making, the Cape to Cape Track offers a unique view of WA's most popular national park. See page 28.



Karijini's new visitor centre provides a cultural and environmental focus point for visitors. See 'Karijini Calling' on page 10.



Dirk Hartog Island is our largest island. It has a fascinating history and a valuable biodiversity. Find out why on page 17.



'Landscape at the Heart' is an account of the first LANDSCOPE Expedition to the Carnarvon Range at the edge of the Little Sandy Desert. See page 40.



Does the delicate work of Western Australia's botanical artists have a place in the high-tech world of science? See page 23.

COVER

Aboriginal names have always been part of Australia's history, and many of the well known names for Australian animals are in common use today. 'Ancient animals, ancient names' (page 35) makes a case for adopting more Aboriginal names for our native mammals. The brush-tailed phascogale, for example, was known to Nyoongar people as the 'wambenga'.

Cover illustration by Philippa Nikulinsky

