

endangered

by Peter Mawson



Muir's corella

The western long-billed or Muir's corella (*Cacatua pastinator pastinator* Gould 1841) is one of two subspecies of long-billed corella that are endemic to south-western Australia. Muir's corella (named after Lake Muir near Manjimup where it is common) is a large bird 430–480 millimetres long, weighing 560–815 grams. It is mostly white (though the underparts are often stained with dirt) except for orange lores (the area between the beak and the eyes). The orange bases of the head, neck, breast and belly feathers are more or less concealed. The underwing and tail feathers have a pale yellow basal colour. The skin around the eyes is bluish-grey.

Muir's corellas nest in hollows in large trees. Eggs are laid from September to November, with incubation lasting 26–29 days. The chicks spend about nine weeks in the nest before fledging. The former distribution of Muir's corella extended from the Swan and Avon rivers south-west to Augusta and

south-east to Broomehill, but the subspecies is now restricted to small areas from Boyup Brook, McAlinden and Qualeup south to the Perup River, Lake Muir and east to Frankland, Rocky Gully and Cambellup.

Muir's corella inhabits open river valleys in areas that are now largely developed for farming and tree plantations. It is locally common, but generally uncommon and patchily distributed. It is usually seen in small flocks, but sometimes up to 1000 birds gather around food sources at critical times of the year.

Clearing of natural habitat, poisoning and shooting significantly reduced the population in the past, and it now numbers only around 3000 birds. Poisoning no longer occurs, and shooting is now rare. However, continuing changes in land use within the range of Muir's corella pose ongoing threats. Replacing crops and stock with tree plantations, and the associated removal of isolated paddock trees, denies the birds' access to important feeding areas and critical nesting

habitat. Feral bees that take over scarce nest hollows have also been identified as a newly emerging threat. The other subspecies of long-billed corella, the Butler's corella (*C. pastinator butleri*)—named after distinguished naturalist Harry Butler—that occurs in the northern Wheatbelt, is steadily expanding its range southwards. Interbreeding with this subspecies and competition for nest hollows are potential threats for Muir's corella.

Muir's corella also causes damage to cereal crops (at seeding time), competes with stock for summer hand feed and causes damage to newly-planted wine grape canes and mature grape crops. Large summer roosting flocks also cause significant noise nuisance for farming families. A recovery plan has been drafted to help manage the threats to Muir's corella and to help reduce the adverse impact that the corellas have on farming activities. Many of the recovery actions identified are already being implemented.

Photos by Ian Wheeler

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