

WHITE COCKATOOS MOVEMENTS

Have you noticed that white cockatoos have moved into new areas throughout southern Western Australia during the past two years? If so, they could be one or a mixture of three species of birds; Long-billed Corellas, Little Corellas or a few aviary bred Sulphur-crested Cockatoos. While there are unfortunately always a few aviary escapees, it appears that the Corella species in the wild in W.A. is on the move. These together with the Sulphur-crested Cockatoos have brought a white cloud of uncertainty to our doorstep.

Whilst it is pleasant at times to observe new events or strange happenings in the world of nature, such changes can lead to complications for man.

In a stable environment, the numbers of the component species do not usually show large fluctuations, however when man changes the environment, large scale changes in numbers and distribution may occur, e.g. agricultural clearing to the north of Perth has allowed the Little Corella to extend its range to the south in the last 30-40 years, the Long Billed has also extended its distribution to the east.

Little Corellas (*Cacatua sanguinea*) are generally thought of as loud and gregarious birds, their raucous calls have at times driven people to the edge of despair. They have also been known to damage power lines and television aerials by their prolific numbers and chewing habits. These birds are found generally distributed from Carnamah to throughout the Kimberley, feeding mainly on seeds of grasses and legumes. They prefer native grass seeds to grain crop when the former are available.



Long-billed Corella—(*Cacatua tenuirostris*) (Local Western Australian bird with no collar colour)

Photo by L. Moore

Long-billed Corellas (*Cacatua tenuirostris*), also a noisy bird, are uncommon but may be locally abundant in their small range. They are found in a narrow band from the open woodland and farmlands north of Perth to just south of the Murchison district of W.A. There is also a small area in the mid-south-west of the State which supports its own colony.

Long-billed Corellas are different to Little Corellas in that the aforementioned spend most of the day feeding on the ground. They leave their roosting trees, moving out into open country where they scratch about for seeds and use their extended upper bill, digging for roots and bulbs.

Wildlife officers on a recent field trip from Perth to Perenjori, reported numerous sightings of Little Corellas in the Moora/Miling area.

Whilst ornithological references of recent times have indicated a possible southwards progression of range, doubts have been expressed as to the severity of the invasion.

From photographs taken, there is no doubt that Corellas, either Little or Long-billed were sighted on the trip but positive identification is extremely difficult at even a moderate distance.

To date C.S.I.R.O. have not sighted Little Corellas south of Coorow.

It has been determined that the two species are flying together in the Carnamah/Three Springs area, but whether there has been mixed breeding is not known.

C.S.I.R.O. think that Little Corellas could become an increasing minor nuisance if their southern range is further extended and becomes permanent. Dealing with them in the correct manner will need careful planning. The example at present is Long-billed Corellas. In the Hill River District at Jurien they are a nuisance, however a short distance north, none can be found.



Long-billed Corella—(*Cacatua tenuirostris*) (Eastern States sub species with red collar)

Photo by G. Chapman

At present there are two flocks (maybe more) of either Long-billed or Little Corellas (or mixed) in the Perth metropolitan area. One flock of approximately 30 birds, seen regularly in the mornings at Lake Monger, is thought to be travelling around the western suburbs.

At Midland there is a mixed flock of Little Corella and Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, the numbers seen at Midland varies from a few to 80-90, also the number of each species in the flock varies. These changes are undoubtedly due to each species being nomadic.

Four birds travelling together have been noticed making regular fortnightly visits to the Wembley Downs area. Whether they are a separate group or a fragment of the Lake Monger flock is unknown. From the distance observed they could be any one of the three white species.

With the situation as it stands, regarding numbers and identifications in the State, it would be advantageous for this Department and C.S.I.R.O. to be advised by anyone having positive information on species, places, numbers and dates. There is particular interest in sightings in all areas south of Carnamah. Exact identification of species must be determined remembering that the antics and general appearance of all species of Corellas are very similar. It is preferable to observe at close range with a telescope or even closer with binoculars.



Little Corella—(*Cacatua sanguinea*)

Photo by G. Chapman

LITTLE CORELLA—*Cacatua sanguinea*

The Little Corella, also known as the bare-eyed cockatoo has a repertoire of more than 10 calls. The most common used are:— the alarm call, (an unforgettable raucous screech); a two syllable, wavering contact call in flight; a range of raucous calls associated with breeding pairs. Adult birds are approximately 380 mm in length including 160 mm of tail. The sexes are alike with general plumage being white with sulphur yellow under wings and tail. These birds have no distinct crest but when alarmed, the feathers on top of the head can be raised. There are small reddish coloured feathers between the bill and the eye. This varies in shape with age and possibly sex. The bill is horn coloured, short and typical cockatoo shape. The legs are dark grey.

LONG-BILLED CORELLA—*Cacatua tenuirostris*

The Long-billed or Slender-billed Corella has a contact call frequent in flight, sounding like a three syllable chuckle. The bird shrieks when alarmed.

Adult birds are approximately 375 mm in length including 130 mm of tail.

The colour and general appearance of this bird is exactly like the Little Corella, however the upper mandible is extended for digging roots and bulbs. It is thought that the length of the upper bill increases with the bird's age. Hence immature Long-billed Corellas could be mistaken for Little Corellas. Ornithologists or bird fanciers who have handled the two species could possibly distinguish the difference.

The Trainee Wildlife Officer

After receiving his basic training at Head Office, the trainee obtains further experience by working with other Wildlife Officers in the field.

The Wildlife Officer's main duty is to enforce the Wildlife Conservation Act and Regulations. His duties in enforcing the Act and Regulations are many and varied, some of which are listed below:

- (i) Inspections are made frequently of fauna and flora reserves and it is the duty of the officer to ensure that no illegal shooting takes place or the habitat is being destroyed by the dumping of rubbish, removal of soil, vegetation, etc.
- (ii) Patrols are carried out in the areas where illegal shooting is suspected.
- (iii) Licenced bird trappers are checked in their area of trapping to ensure that the strict regulations placed upon them are adhered to.
- (iv) Inspections of all bird dealers and some aviculturists are made to ensure that they comply with the regulations.
- (v) Inspections of all kangaroo skin dealers and processors are carried out on a regular basis, as are inspections of the licensed kangaroo shooter and his equipment.

Regular patrols are made by metropolitan wildlife officers and those stationed in country districts, and it is the duty of the officer to apprehend any person who is committing a breach of the Act or Regulations. He then must compile a detailed prosecution report and give evidence in Court as required by the Department.

The Wildlife Officer is required to do a certain amount of manual work, such as erecting nature Reserve signs, washing and cleaning the Department's vehicles and the care and maintenance of other Departmental property.

Qualifications and Requirements

Education: An Achievement Certificate or the equivalent is required. Higher qualifications would give the applicant preference.

Physique: A minimum of 172 cm (5ft 8ins.) in height and 59 kg (130lbs.) in weight and sound physical health.

Age: 18-25 years.