

FAUNA

EVEN A STUMP WILL DO!

by Kingsley Miller



IN the spring and summer of 1996, staff from CALM's Nature Conservation Division were involved in the monitoring of large numbers of nests of Carnaby's cockatoo, which were located in several shires in the northern Wheatbelt. Carnaby's cockatoo, *Calyptorhynchus latirostris*, is also known as the white-tailed black cockatoo, and is listed as a threatened species.

The nests were located in a diverse range of sites, including private property, vacant Crown land, road reserves, rail reserves and shire reserves (including one golf course). More than 100 wandoo (*Eucalyptus wandoo*) and salmon gums (*E. salmonophloia*) were examined. The diameter of the trees, their health and location were all recorded.

All of the trees used as nest sites by the Carnaby's cockatoos were large (diameter greater than 400 mm), with the largest wandoo tree being 980 mm in diameter and the largest salmon gum being 910 mm in diameter. About 60% of the trees used were wandoo and 40% were salmon gums. Most of the trees

were still alive, but nearly 15% of the trees were completely dead. Most of the trees had some dead limbs in their canopy, which is not surprising since it is the loss of dead limbs which leads to hollow formation.

Two trees in which nests were located consisted of nothing more than dead stumps 2-2.5 m high, with no branches at all. The floor of the nest chambers in these two nests were only 1-1.2 m above the ground. So we shouldn't think that just because a tree is dead that it can't still be used by birds for nesting.

Another interesting thing that was observed was that many of the nest hollows were used by more than one species of animal during the breeding season. Several hollows had been used by mountain ducks, *Tadorna tadornoides*, and wood ducks (or maned geese), *Chenonetta jubata*. These two species of duck nest during winter and early spring, so the hollows are usually vacant by the time the Carnaby's cockatoos want to begin nesting.

Six abandoned duck nests were found containing as many as 16 addled eggs and a lot of soft

duck down. Cockatoos were observed sitting near the nests but not using them. Once the duck eggs and down had been removed, the Carnaby's cockatoos moved straight in every time. Some Carnaby's cockatoos are more determined than others, since two nests were located where the cockatoos had laid their eggs on top of the addled duck eggs. Clearly, a tree or hollow that looks good to one species can also appeal to other species.

Kingsley Miller is a Wildlife Officer in the Wildlife Protection Section, CALM, Como. He can be contacted on (09) 334 0470.



*Kingsley Miller peers in a stump, watched by Lyle Gilbert.
(photo: Gary Merrin, Sunday Times)*