

## FAUNA

### Conserving Carnaby's Cockatoo

By Belinda Cale

Carnaby's cockatoo (or the short-billed form of the white-tailed black cockatoo) ranges over much the south-west corner of Western Australia, extending from the Murchison River to Esperance. Unlike the long-billed form of the black cockatoo which is restricted to the wetter forests of the south-west throughout the year, Carnaby's cockatoo breeds in the wheatbelt and then moves to coastal areas in summer. It is at this time that large flocks of Carnaby's cockatoos may be seen feeding in pine plantations north of Perth.

Although Carnaby's cockatoo is highly visible, flocks of cockatoos are often comprised of mostly old birds and include few young birds. In addition, the species has disappeared from many areas where it formerly occurred and there are concerns for its future. Much of the Carnaby's cockatoo habitat has been cleared or fragmented. During the breeding season Carnaby's cockatoo feeds primarily on the seeds of native vegetation, and unlike many other local cockatoos does not feed on cereal crops or in pasture. Clearing of heathland surrounding breeding sites reduces the amount of food for breeding birds and young. In addition, the lack of eucalypt regeneration in many woodland remnants has led to a gradual loss of hollow-bearing nesting trees. As a result of these changes, Carnaby's cockatoo has undergone a major decline in range, particularly in drier areas and the central wheatbelt. Regional extinctions are likely to continue for some decades since these birds are long-lived, with an average life expectancy of 15 years.

With funding from the Natural Heritage Trust, a recovery plan is being developed for Carnaby's



cockatoo. The aim of this plan is to work out ways in which we can ensure the persistence of this endangered cockatoo. Much of the cockatoo's existing habitat is found in agricultural areas and, consequently, the involvement and cooperation of private landholders will be vital to the success of this plan. For example, it will be important to conserve existing woodland, particularly salmon gum and wandoo, where the cockatoos are known to breed. Replanting of heath near breeding hollows will assist Carnaby's cockatoos in feeding their young in spring. In many cases, the revegetation or conservation of areas to assist Carnaby's cockatoos will have added benefits to the landholder in reducing salinity problems.

If you think you have Carnaby's cockatoos breeding on your property or are interested in being involved in the recovery of this cockatoo, please contact me at CALM's Threatened Species and Communities Unit on 9405 5172.

*Belinda Cale is a Project Officer with WATSCU at CALM, Woodvale.*