

MEMBERS' PAGE

Ivan Carnaby and the black cockatoos

ABOUT 1958 a fellow called Ivan Carnaby was caretaking the Galena Mine for Frank Burnett, the owner. Ivan was a handyman and he removed most of the old Jarrah weatherboard cladding from our farm house and re-clad the walls with nailed-on asbestos sheets. He also made two gates for Grandpa's six-foot high, chook-proof wire-netting garden fence. These gates were wood-framed (Jarrah) with corrugated iron on the bottom half and rabbit netting on the top. They were beautiful gates, easy to open and close and so much better than the old ones which you had to fight your way through.

Ivan Carnaby had a couple of pet red-tailed black cockatoos. I recall one used to camp on the bottom rail of his iron bed at Galena. I had never seen black cockies in captivity. Dad would only let us keep galahs or twenty-eight parrots as they were considered to be vermin. The black cockies, or 'Titandees' as we called them, were harmless, ate double gees, never came near the house and had to be left alone. Carnaby actually did research into black cockatoos; one of the white tailed species is called Carnaby's cockatoo.

The Titandees have always been around Galena. By the 1930s huge flocks could be seen on the cleared paddocks cracking open dried double-gees and eating the small yellow seed inside. The red-tailed black cockies didn't seem to nest on the Murchison River around Galena but flew into the area from further north where some nesting sites are known. Those who study these birds, and others, tell that although we see big flocks of black cockies around the numbers are static or declining. This is because they live for many years and we are continually seeing the same birds

A STORY OF RED-TAILED BLACK COCKATOOS *

Bob Porter

whose numbers may suddenly dive to dangerously low levels. They may not produce new offspring due to the fact that their nesting areas have been disturbed.

In 1995 I met Dr Denis Saunders who was a leading WA-based bird scientist. When I told Dr Saunders that we had known Ivan Carnaby in his hey-day (1950s) he was very surprised - and impressed. He obviously thought a lot of Carnaby's research, but being a much younger man than myself, had never had the chance to meet him.

Red-tailed Black Cockatoos nesting on "Riverside"

In March of 2002 we noticed that some Red-tailed black cockies were hanging around a hollow Coolibah (*Eucalyptus victrix*) near the Murchison River down from the



Very young chick (April)



Older chick (June)

homestead. I had seen this before but never had I been able to find a pair actually nesting. One morning on our walk a large female black cockatoo came out of the hollow and we decided that they may be serious about nesting. Later I began driving past slowly a few times as they seemed less afraid of a vehicle than people on foot. The female bird would just look out of the hollow and remain there. I was now certain that they were nesting and was very excited to think that we were able to be hosts to this rare event.

I rang Kevin Marshall from CALM in Geraldton and he told me that the black cockies nest in autumn which surprised me as other cockatoos all appear to nest in August/September. As the tree was fairly short and the hollow quite open I was worried that a cat or bungarra would invade the nest, so kept a look out. After a week or two (about the 5th of April) I noticed that the female was not there. The male bird had not been seen since the first sighting in March. I climbed the tree and looked in the hollow and could see a single tiny chick about 600mm down. A week later I took the ladder and photographed the chick - who appeared as a yellow prickle of fluff looking up for food.

For the next eight weeks we inspected the female chick every few days and by now she was large and I would say ready to leave the nest. During this time we never once saw the parents but by the chick's healthy condition it would seem that they had fed her well.

In April and May 2003 we checked the nest site and found no nesting signs but in early September we saw the female fly out of the hollow, and later I watched the parents from a distance when they would fly in and land near the tree - I presumed to feed the offspring.

(* In part adapted from "Pure Galena - a story of settlement in the Australian Outback" by Bob Porter)