PRACTICALITIES

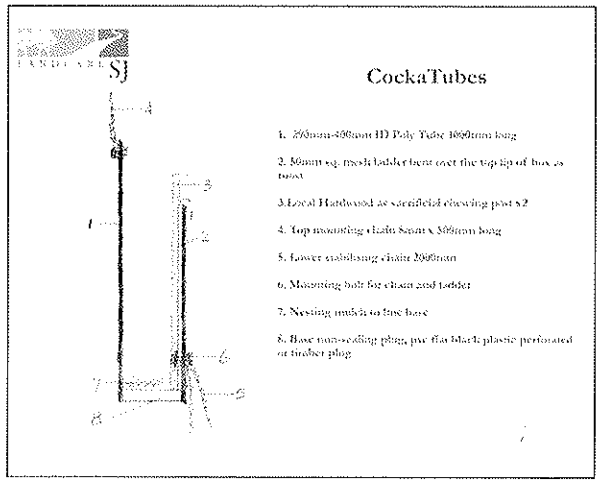
THE EVOLUTION OF CONSERVATION - "COCKATUBES"

Alan Elliott

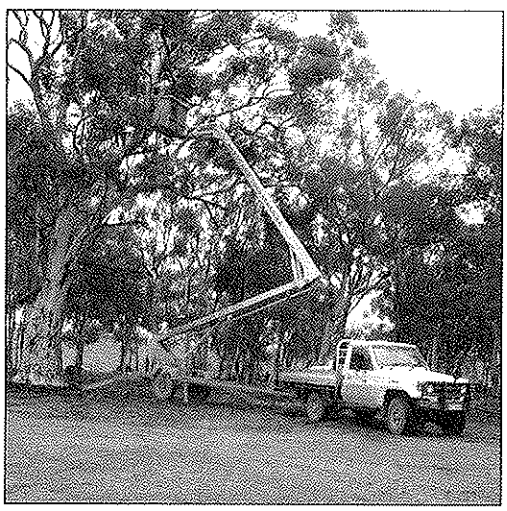
I guess that I am no different from many others who have been drawn into wildlife protection. What started as an interest in a pretty flower or a different bird evolved into the study of its habitat and all the things that influence its survival. Before long I could have been accused of being a "greenie" or "tree hugger" but, what the hell at least I care.

These transitions led me into an active roll in the local Landcare group in Serpentine Jarrahdale and among other activities I played a part in the Black Cockatoo Recovery Program. We started with a wish to help the Black Cockatoo Recovery Program and when we were offered the use of poly pipe from BHP Billiton's mining in Lenister the project was born. At the same time the WA Museum was engaged with the Water Corporation in the Cockatoo Care program and Ron Johnstone (Curator of Ornithology at the WA Museum) and Tony Kirkby, (Black Cockatoo Recovery Research Officer) became willing sources of information and inspiration to me.

Our first nest designs did not win any awards as faults in our design were pointed out before we managed to hoist one up a tree. We took on board all the criticisms and have now created the "Cockatube" which is, for want of a better term, a Cockatoo penthouse from Poly pipe. The evolved design has been used by the WA Museum in their projects and we gladly interpreted this as a design approval.



With additional support from Lottery West, the Serpentine Jarrahdale Land Conservation District Committee (SJ LCDC) recently installed 30 Cockatubes within the Peel – Harvey Region. The SJ LCDC have also partnered with the Southern Gateway Alliance on the Bunbury Bypass project to install an additional 7 Cockatubes. The Shire of Serpentine Jarrahdale have recently been awarded funding from the South West Biodiversity Project to install 30 Cockatubes on Shire vested reserves. So, we now have a total of 67 Cockatubes installed thus far and will become part of an ongoing monitoring program spanning the entire Peel – Harvey Catchment. It is early days but there are already residents in some of the poly nests and a lot of birds investigating and climbing in and out of others—we presume in the act of house hunting.



Installation using a cherry picker.

The advantages of the Cockatube that we have identified are that they are very durable and UV resistant, they don't get eaten by the birds themselves, they are weather-proof and, due to their wall thickness, their thermal dynamics are similar to that of wood. However, the most significant result for the Cockatubes design we have seen so far is that it deters feral bees from claiming the hollow, one of the major reasons why the survival of black cockatoos is under threat. It would be nice to replant a natural habitat but while the food trees can be grown in a relatively short time period a tree takes around 250 years to produce a hollow large enough for a bird to nest in. Neither I nor the cockatoos have the capacity to wait that long.

We provide (at a cost) the "Cockatubes" to people that have had to clear an area that has potential nest hollows or to anyone that has just decided to help the cockatoo to survive. If you have any queries please contact Alan Elliott on (08) 9525 2005 or Glen Byleveld at the SJ Landcare Centre (08) 9526 0012.