

Old hollows renovated in time for 2004 breeding season

A team of Birds Australia volunteers is currently working its way around breeding sites repairing Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo nesting hollows.

The trio, consisting of John Lauri, Tom Kemp and Bob Veletta have so far repaired approximately 40 hollows and more will be completed in the next few months. While some of the hollows

have required extensive repairs, others have just needed maintenance. Repairs are required when wood around the nesting chamber, or above or below it, is fragile and splitting open; branches have been torn away exposing the chamber; or the base of the tree has opened up and the floor of the chamber has fallen away. Often the 'mudguts' or benthic

material that fills the hollow of a tree and makes up the floor of the nesting chamber is lost when cracks split open.

Of the problems listed above,



Left: John Lauri (top) and Tom Kemp fill a repaired hollow with 'mudguts' (the repaired section of hollow starts at John's knee and continues all the way down the trunk). Right: Tom Kemp and Bob Veletta (in foreground) make repairs to the base of a hollow. Photographs courtesy John Lauri

the most common repair is to nail or screw old tin or metal around the area then to repack the tree with mudguts (usually found nearby in other fallen trees or around the base of other trees).

Another common reason why a good nesting hollow does not get used is because it has been blocked up. Branches, abandoned eggs (particularly

large clutches of duck eggs), dead animals or birds (including mountain ducks, wood ducks and Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos) have all prevented perfectly good hollows from being used. While the obvious solution is to remove the obstructions, another option, particularly for addled eggs, is

to leave them in the hollow if they can't be easily reached, break them with a stick and cover them over with a thick layer of mudguts.

Of the hollows earmarked for repair and maintenance by the Birds Australia volunteers, many have been used regularly by Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos year after

year. As many of the repaired hollows as possible will be monitored in the coming breeding season to gauge the success of the project.

The work has been made possible by receipt of a community grant from the WA Environment Ministers Office to cover the costs of materials and travel.

Coorow Carnaby Field Day celebrates Cup Carnival

About 35 people celebrated the 2003 Melbourne Cup at a Waddi Forest property but cheering Makybe Diva on to win wasn't the only agenda item for the day.

The Coorow Carnaby's Field Day was an opportunity for landholders in the area to find out more about their local populations of Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo.

Features of the day included repairs to a hollow regularly used by a pair of Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos until splits in the side caused it to be abandoned. The hollow repair consisted of the splits being covered over with a piece of tin which was nailed in place. Several buckets of 'mudguts', the material formed inside tree hollows, were then poured into the hollow to form a solid base. This hollow will be monitored during the 2004 breeding season to see if it is used by Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos again.

A three week old wild chick was also banded and DNA tested by CALM staff. CALM Special Investigations Senior Officer, Rick Dawson, also gave a talk about the department's efforts to combat the illegal trade in black

cockatoos.

Alison Doley, who is a member of the Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo Recovery Team, discussed the ways she and her husband John have developed to manage breeding habitat, and her observations of Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos at their property in Waddi Forest.

Professor Stephen Davies, ornithologist and Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo Recovery Team member, gave a talk on work carried out in the Waddi Forest district a couple of years ago to determine where the local population of breeding cockatoos feed. Landholders were also able to find out about local provenance plant species used by Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo for feeding or breeding purposes.

Fiona Falconer, Secretary of the Waddi Forest Landcare Group and Land for Wildlife Officer for the Northern Agricultural Region, talked about Land for Wildlife and recovery actions for Carnaby's Black-

Cockatoo and Leonie McMahon, project officer for the Birds Australia recovery project outlined work being carried out by landholders to assist their breeding populations of Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo.

And of course the Cup was celebrated in style with a chicken & champagne luncheon supplied by the local CWA.

The day was jointly coordinated by the Waddi Forest Landcare group and Birds Australia's Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo Recovery Project and supported by Land for Wildlife.



Left: Alison Doley, landholder at Koobabbie, holds a young chick being DNA tested.



Above: Field day attendees gather round to watch a chick being DNA testing.

2004 breeding records

Thanks to the many people who are still filling in sighting forms of Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos. People often ask if they should continue to keep records. The answer is yes but what we are particularly interested in at the moment are records of breeding birds. Breeding takes place mostly in the Wheatbelt so we are targeting activity observed during the breeding season (from late winter through spring). Probable or definite breeding records outside of the normal breeding range are also of great interest. Activities highly indicative of

breeding include cockatoos entering or exiting hollows or chewing hollows and males feeding females. Regular patterns of behaviour eg birds flying back and forth in the same pattern at the same times of day or gathering at the same feeding, roosting or drinking points are also indications.

What do we do with the information?

Records from key breeding sites are added together to form a picture of breeding and feeding activity in each particular area. Records from other areas are all databased and provide a valuable resource which will be accessed in the future.

Birds Australia Volunteer activities in 2003

Between September and December 2003, about 30 Birds Australia WA volunteers were out and about at key breeding sites conducting surveys of breeding Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos.

Six surveys were carried out at four different breeding sites. The earliest survey was planned for late August but the cockatoos had not arrived back in any numbers by that time. Generally in the northern wheatbelt sites in 2003 the cockatoos did seem to return a bit later than normal.

The table below provides a snapshot of what we found during the days we conducted the surveys.

All of these sites had been visited in previous years and while we were still interested in identifying active hollows we also had the objective of identifying corresponding feeding sites.

We've been able to do this with the assistance of landholders who have been making observations of feeding and breeding activity. For the first time we also succeeded in tracking the birds between their breeding and feeding sites using teams of volunteers in contact with two-way radios.

The cockatoos were observed feeding on a range of introduced and native species, all of which are well known

food sources for them.

They were:

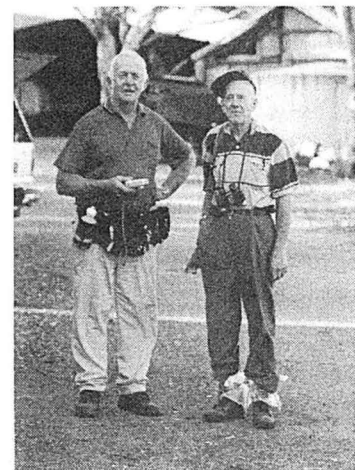
- Pines
- Wild geranium
- Wild radish
- Canola (prior to swathing, swathed and on stubble after harvest)
- Marri nuts
- Native vegetation (Dryandra, Hakea, Grevillea but exact species not identified)

The objective of gathering this information is to be able to produce maps showing feeding sites in relation to breeding sites, and corridors the cockatoos use to navigate between the two.

About 30 different volunteers participated in the surveys in 2003. Anyone interested in being involved is welcome to give me a call to discuss. Generally the surveys will be between three and four days long though people are welcome to come for shorter periods. The main activities are carried out from late afternoon till dark and from early (sometimes very early) to late morning. Sometimes the work involves observing breeding hollows and at other times we track birds to and from breeding and feeding sites.

We will set our objectives for each survey site based on what information we need and in consultation with landholders with regard to how they want

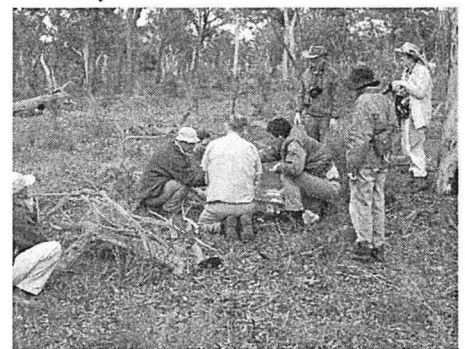
surveys conducted on their properties.



Above: Birds Australia volunteers Niel Adams and Tom Delaney. Photograph courtesy Eleanor Adams



Above: hard at work near Gillingarra. Below: Volunteers assist with banding chicks near Nyabing. Photographs courtesy Niel Adams



Breeding Site	Survey dates (2003)	No. BAWA volunteers	No. confirmed breeding hollows	Total no birds seen	No corresponding feeding sites identified
Gillingarra	Sep 1-3	5	1	53	1
Calingiri	Oct 30 - 1	8	11	30	4
Nyabing	Oct 28-30	16-20	14	-	-
Walebing	Nov 5-7	6	14	30	4
Gillingarra	Nov 18-20	7	8	130	5
Nyabing	Dec 1-3	10	-	83	7

Painted Carnaby chicks...where are they?

In the 2003 breeding season we painted the tail feathers of 29 Carnaby chicks in the northern wheatbelt so their movements could be tracked post fledging.

They've proved elusive.

The white tail panels of the 29 were marked on the underside only with either red, green, blue or orange paint, depending on the locations of their breeding sites. It was expected they would move toward the coast onto the Swan Coastal Plain between Perth and Geraldton and into the Greater Perth area, though exactly where we could not predict.

So far, we have had three sightings of chick's tails painted blue. One chick was actually unwell when it was found by Moora resident Wally Kerkhoff and later died. Another report of black cockatoos with red tails was made near Eneabba but it was later determined that these were the real McCoy ie Red-tailed Black Cockatoos of the inland race *Samueli*. In itself this is an interesting sighting because the

birds were outside of the normal range of this species.

Of the 29 chicks painted, we have been able to check the hollows of all but six and establish that all those checked fledged except one, the remains of which we found dead inside the hollow but above the entrance. It appears this chick climbed up and then became stuck in a split in the wood.

We expect to lose quite a few fledglings in the first year since the natural attrition rate of young birds is high. Still, we assume there are some chicks flying around out there with brightly painted tails.

We just need to find them. We will be conducting surveys in April and early May in areas where large numbers of Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos are found.

If you see any chicks with painted tails please let Birds Australia WA know.

The sort of information we need:

- Date/time of observation
- Colour of paint
- Number of marked birds

- Number of birds accompanying marked birds
- Location (be as specific as you can eg place name, property location number, distance from closest road intersection, GPS reading if you have it, distance and direction from nearest town)
- Your contact details

You can record your observation by:

Calling the Birds Australia office during office hours (9.30 am to 12 noon weekdays) on 9383 7749;

Emailing the Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo Recovery Project officer, Leonie McMahon, at ljmcmahon@bigpond.com; or

Completing the form available on the Birds Australia webpage ([www.birdswa.iinet.net.au/projects/Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo](http://www.birdswa.iinet.net.au/projects/Carnaby's%20Black-Cockatoo)) and emailing it or faxing it to the Birds Australia office on 9387 8412 or sending it to 71 Oceanic Drive, Floreat, WA 6014.

The objectives of this project are to test the tail-painting method to see how successfully it can be used to track Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos and to gather information about where Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos from particular breeding populations travel to after they leave their breeding sites.

The trial is a joint effort between the Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo Recovery Project being run by Birds Australia WA, the Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo Recovery Team, Department of Conservation and Land Management and WA Museum.



CALM officers, Rick Dawson and Adam Meyer, paint the tail of a young chick.
Photograph: courtesy Rick Dawson

Update on artificial nesting hollow trial

This coming breeding season will be an important one for the artificial nesting hollow trial. The trial began in 2003 when the Million Trees Program, a division of Men of the Trees, obtained funding from the WWF Threatened Species Network to grow some trees and conduct the trial.

The trial is being carried out to determine the circumstances under which Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos will use artificial hollows. Of the 43 hollows made, approximately a third were put up prior to the 2003 breeding season. The remainder will hopefully be in place before the beginning of the 2004 breeding season. Of the hollows in place during the 2003 breeding season it has been confirmed that three in Moora were used by Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos. In other areas twenty eights were frequently observed entering some hollows and others were not used at all.



Ornithologist and recovery team member, Professor Stephen Davies, is overseeing the trial and it is being carried out in conjunction with the Birds Australia project. The nesting hollows were made by Moora resident Wally Kerkhoff and have been placed with several different landholders throughout the northern wheatbelt.



For more information....

about the Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo Recovery Project you can contact the Project Officer: Leonie McMahon on
Ph: 9287 2448 Mobile: 0438 678492

Email: ljmcmahon@bigpond.com

You can also visit the Birds Australia WA website on
[www.birdswa.iinet.net.au/Projects/ Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo](http://www.birdswa.iinet.net.au/Projects/Carnaby's%20Black-Cockatoo)
(Photograph courtesy John Lauri)

How you can help Carnaby's Black- Cockatoos in your area

If you live in the Wheatbelt and Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos breed in your area you can:

- Protect known feeding and breeding sites (usually by fencing or excluding stock, controlling weeds, protecting woodland against firewood collection);
- Revegetate known feeding and nesting sites.
- Repair old and damaged nesting hollows;
- Control competitor species (with the necessary approval);
- Create corridors of suitable vegetation between areas frequented by Carnaby's;
- Leave old dead eucalypts standing. Carnaby's frequently nest in the hollows of dead stags; and
- Monitor breeding activities.

If you live in the Perth Metropolitan area or you see Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo feeding in your area you can help them by ensuring there is plenty of suitable feeding habitat around. You can:

- Plant suitable feed plants on your property.
- Lobby local councils to grow feed plants for Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo in public spaces in your municipality and to ensure important feeding areas are maintained for the future.

If these cockatoos are endangered why do I see so many around?

This is a commonly asked question in some areas, particularly on parts of the coastal plain. In other places, especially the eastern wheatbelt and parts of the southern wheatbelt, accounts of flocks of Rainbirds so large they blackened the sky as they flew by now belong to history.

Over the decades the number of Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos making their annual journey into the wheatbelt has declined so much that they are now locally extinct in up to a third of their former breeding range. Many landholders have watched Carnaby's disappear from their areas during their own lifetimes. However it is still possible to see large numbers of Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo. It's worth remembering that:

- Breeding pairs of Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo migrate between their winter breeding grounds and summer feeding grounds and in general the cockatoos are highly mobile. This can give the

impression that more birds exist than actually do.

- Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos tend to congregate together during the non-breeding season so the large flocks you see may come together from many different areas. They are present in large numbers at some remaining feeding sites, for example Yanchep National Park and the Gnangarra pine

plantations, because they have limited options.

- Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos are long-lived birds, living up to 40-50 years in the wild. It is believed the current population of Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo is an aging one because recruitment of young birds into the population has decreased so much. When the older birds die it is feared there will be a crash in numbers from which the species may never recover.



Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo Recovery Project

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Birds Australia is a national non-profit organization working to conserve Australian native birds and their habitats. Birds Australia WA Inc is a state-wide group with an active interest in the enjoyment of birds and the research and conservation of the state's birds. The WA branch has a newsletter called WA Bird Notes and regularly conducts excursions and expeditions. All are welcome to take part in surveys and projects being run by the group.

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