

Cocky Notes

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Photo: R. Pickering



Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo numbers still down in Perth

BirdLife Australia's 2012 Great Cocky Count (GCC) has found that numbers of Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo in the Perth area are still lower than reported in 2010.

This year's count was conducted at sunset on 15 April and involved 252 volunteer observers surveying 206 sites across the southwest from Geraldton to Esperance. As a result, our database now includes 359 sites, 141 of which are confirmed roost sites.

The 2012 GCC confirmed there has been a statistically significant decline in the number of cockatoos in the Swan Region (i.e. Yanchep to Mandurah and east into the Darling Range) since 2010, down 40% to 4036 counted in 2012. Numbers remained relatively stable between the 2011 and 2012 GCCs.

The mean size of night-time roosts in 2012 in the Swan Region was not significantly different to that recorded in 2010 or 2011. However, roosts in 2011 were significantly smaller than in 2010. Only eight roosts of over 150 cockatoos were recorded in 2012, compared with 19 large roosts in 2010. The 2012 GCC also showed a decrease in the number of active roosts south of the Swan River.

While all the reasons for the decreased number of Carnaby's are not clear, habitat clearance is likely to be an important factor. Pressure on cockatoo habitat in the Perth and Peel Region will continue because of a rapidly growing population and increasing housing and infrastructure requirements.

The full 2012 GCC report and a summary can be found at www.birdlife.org.au/carnabys

To report new roost sites for any black-cockatoos, please contact Tamara Kabat on 9287 2204 or greatcockycount@birdlife.org.au.

Tamara Kabat

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birds are in our nature

A love affair with the cockatoos of Coomaloo Creek

Last month I was lucky enough to assist with one of the two annual Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo nesting surveys at Coomaloo Creek in the northern Wheatbelt, coordinated by former CSIRO chief research scientist Dr Denis Saunders and Senior DEC Wildlife Officer Rick Dawson. During our week in the field, we surveyed over 150 natural and artificial hollows on several private properties, and I peppered Denis and Rick with almost as many questions. Highlights were many, including a total of 58 active nest hollows – up from 35 during the equivalent survey in 2011, a pair of cockies copulating, and my first Carnaby's chick.

It's an understatement to say that Denis knows a thing or two about Carnaby's. To many, he's regarded as the authority on the species and much of his knowledge and expertise stems from the research he's conducted at Coomaloo Creek. Denis has studied and monitored the cockatoos here for over 40 years and knows the site intimately. His studies of the Coomaloo population helped improve understanding of breeding behaviour, diet, movements, nestling growth, vocalisations and breeding success of Carnaby's. Despite extensive clearing of native vegetation over time at Coomaloo Creek, breeding success remains high.



Photo: M. Fossey

Dr Denis Saunders (left) and Rick Dawson take the measurements of a Carnaby's chick at Coomaloo Creek

Denis's connection with the site is as strong as ever, and he shared with the survey team a number of his fieldwork experiences. We visited Denis's old base camp; he and his research assistant John Ingram conducted weekly monitoring trips throughout the cockatoos' breeding season in the 1970s. They lived and slept in a 3-sided tin shelter and spent countless hours entering their data in beaten-up, old caravan.

Denis recounts how he and John used to work well into the night, as this was the best time to trap adult females in their nest hollows so they could be weighed, measured and banded. Having to release the females from their hollows the next day at dawn, meant extremely long working days. Locating the nesting trees in the dark must have been no mean feat, let alone scampering up ladders and extracting the birds from their hollows!

Amazingly, when Denis began his studies at Coomaloo one of the current farmers was just a year old. Denis greets James like a long lost friend and is now imparting his knowledge about the birds to James's own children. The relationship has now spanned three generations. When asked his thoughts on the future of Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo at the site, Denis is optimistic. "Provided the woodland in which they nest and the large areas of kwongan in which they feed are protected, the birds have a very good chance of remaining in the area" he said.

It's obvious that Denis's love affair with the cockatoos of Coomaloo Creek will continue for many years to come.

Matt Fossey

Artworks contribute to cockatoo conservation

Early in 2012, in response to the news that the 2011 Great Cocky Count had shown an alarming drop in numbers of birds in the Perth region, artist Ross Franzi was moved to provide artworks from his far north Queensland Black Cockatoo Gallery to raise funds for the conservation of Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo in WA. Ross's painting 'The Last Survivors' and fellow artist Lainie Joy's 'Study' featured as prizes in BirdLife Australia's 'Birds in Crisis' fundraising appeal in July this year.

To her delight, West Australian Julia Lewis won Lainie Joy's drawing 'Study', and the artwork was presented to Julia at the BirdLife WA office in October this year. BirdLife Australia thanks Ross Franzi and Lainie Joy for their wonderful artworks, and congratulates Julia and the other winner of the donated artworks. We are also grateful to the many people who generously donated to the appeal.

Cheryl Gole



Photo: C. Gole

Appeal winner Julia Lewis with Lainie Joy's artwork 'Study' at the BirdLife WA office in Floreat

Plant pathogen devastating black-cockatoo habitats

Phytophthora Dieback is the name given to species of water mould that is devastating natural ecosystems in the south-west of Western Australia, including many areas important to threatened black-cockatoos. The species responsible for the devastation is *Phytophthora cinnamomi* (pronounced: fy-tof-thor-a cin-a-mo-my), an introduced pathogen that kills plants by feeding on their roots. More than 40% of our endemic flora in the south-west corner is susceptible to this soil-borne pathogen.

The microscopic pathogen is spread by swimming reproductive spores but is also carried in soil and water transported naturally or aided by humans and animals, e.g. car tyres, muddy shoes, irrigation, garden rubbish dumping, feral pig feeding, horse's hooves. Once *Phytophthora Dieback* has been introduced to an ecosystem, it is very difficult to remove. Recent scientific research has shown that it can be removed if strong chemicals are used to kill it and its hosts; however other options are currently being developed.



Banksia woodland impacted by *Phytophthora Dieback*

Management in the Perth region has focused on our Banksia woodland and Jarrah forest ecosystems. The Dieback Working Group has teamed up with BirdLife Australia to protect these habitats from further destruction. Together, we are revegetating priority areas, giving *Phytophthora Dieback* education to the managers and users of these areas, and treating infestations with phosphite. We are also helping to increase black-cockatoo habitat by encouraging the planting of cockatoo foraging species in private gardens through a labelling project. This collaboration is resulting in some very positive outcomes for the cockatoos.

To find out more information about our activities or how you can help please contact Dieback Working Group Coordinator Katherine Sambrooks on (08) 9360 2605 or kat.sambrooks@gmail.com.

Katherine Sambrooks

Plants flowering for Carnaby's

In 2005 and 2006, BirdLife Australia trialled the growing and distribution of food plants for Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo in the northern agricultural region of WA. The trial was a result of the realisation that it was difficult for farmers, Landcare groups and others interested in planting food sources for the cockatoos to source the right plants.

Some of the trial plants went into the ground at Carrah Farms, Sarah and Geoff Mason's property near Calingiri. Since 2006, many of the plants have grown, flowered and set seed, and some of them are now providing some food for the cockatoos.

Cheryl Gole



Threatened Cockatoos Project Manager Matt Fossey (centre) with farmer Sarah Mason (left) in a revegetation plot now attracting the cockatoos

Plants for Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo workshop

Community groups in the Perth region are invited to attend a workshop that will provide information on cockatoo food and roosting plants for revegetation projects. The program will include presentations by BirdLife Australia, Dieback Working Group and DEC. There will be lots of opportunity for discussion and questions.

When: Saturday 24th November 9.30-12.30

Where: Ecology Centre, 167 Perry Lakes Drive, Floreat

Who: members of community groups and other organisations

Cost: free

For more information, or to register, contact

Tamara Kabat: greatcockycount@birdlife.org.au or 9287 2204

Researching micro-climates of nesting hollows

It is common knowledge that the Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo currently faces numerous threats to its survival – the foremost being habitat loss and degradation, which has resulted in a decline in the availability of hollows for breeding.

Artificial hollows have been constructed and erected to act as replacements and help alleviate this problem. These hollows, however, are assembled from black polyethylene piping which has been recycled from the mining industry and may potentially have negative effects on the birds and their offspring. For instance, the pipes may emit harmful toxic fumes, and in conjunction with the colouring and nature of the material could cause unfavourable conditions within the nest. Although these artificial hollows have been used with mixed success over a number of years, it is still unknown as to whether they create a habitat similar to that of natural cavities, and what effect, if any, they're having on breeding success... which is where my honours research comes into effect.

My project will examine this further, and aims to determine whether or not there is a significant difference in microclimates between artificial and natural hollows.

In order to test this, microclimate data is currently being collected using iButtons®, which have been set to collect temperature and humidity data every 30 minutes during the breeding season for approximately 12 weeks. This data will then be analysed and paired with current and historical nesting success and health of cockatoo chicks produced from each hollow type. Also, off-cuts will be taken and exposed to a range of temperatures (comparable to that experienced in the wild) and gas chromatography will be used to measure any toxic fumes emitted.

This research has the potential to make a beneficial contribution to the management of the Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo and could also allow for more effective hollow designs in the future.

Qi Wong (Honours student, UWA)



Photo: Q. Wong

iButton (top centre) in a natural hollow, along with two Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo eggs

Cockatoo conservation logo flies again

One of the threats to cockies is vehicle strikes. Unfortunately, Carnaby's are large birds with a slow pick up flight when they first take off from the ground; they can also fly low when moving through vegetation and over roads. Each year, numbers of the cockatoos are killed by vehicle strike as they attempt to move out of the way of oncoming cars or trucks. In the Albany area earlier this year, at least 13 birds were killed on the South Coast Highway from Cheyne Beach Road to Wellstead, and Chester Pass Road in the Stirling Range National Park. Birds are also hit and killed in built up areas, including regional towns such as Albany, and in suburban streets in Perth.

In an effort to get people to slow down and avoid hitting Carnaby's on roads, Main Roads Western Australia has agreed to erect cockatoo road signs in areas where the birds are at particular risk. When Main Roads needed a clear, recognisable image of a cockatoo, BirdLife Australia made its old Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo Conservation Project logo available, and the result is that the conservation logo is in use on our roads, and again working to conserve our threatened cockatoos.

Signs like the one pictured below are being erected in cockatoo 'black spots' in the Perth region and south west. If you see one of these signs, please slow down. Injured birds can be reported to Kaarakin Black Cockatoo Rehabilitation Centre (08 9390 2288) or the 24-hour Wildcare Helpline (08 9474 9055). For dead birds, contact Perth Zoo.

The photo below in Underwood Avenue in Perth; the nearby bushland has been saved from clearing by the action of BirdLife Australia and other conservation groups. Now, the conservation logo flies nearby to remind motorists to slow down and help protect cockatoos on our streets and roads.

Cheryl Gole



Photo: C. Gole

Cockatoo road sign on Underwood Avenue in Floreat

My journey with Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo

I first became involved with Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo during a school inquiry into ecosystems. My main focus was on birds and I wanted to learn more about the species in my local area. I had a particular interest in cockatoos and parrots, and this led me to Carnaby's.

Whilst walking around my suburb with my Mum one day, we saw a group of Carnaby's land on a tree at the end of my street. I couldn't believe it! There was a flock of endangered cockatoos at the end of my street! I was so excited!! I immediately started thinking of what I could do to help them. I decided to seek permission from my local council to put up a nesting box for the birds.

The City of Canning informed me that the bushland at the end of my street was not a breeding area, and therefore would not be a suitable place to install a box. As I continued my research into the Carnaby's, I started to record sightings of the birds through the Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo Recovery Project, run by BirdLife Australia. I sent in my first sighting sheet via email, and I also found out about the exciting research Christine Groom is doing and contacted her about cockatoo tracking devices through her blog.

At my school, John Wollaston Anglican Community School, the Year 6 students had to put on an exhibition to show what we have learnt over our primary school years. We had to choose a topic linked to technology. I chose to research Carnaby's because technology seems to be a very powerful tool that could help us save the species, through communication, education, satellite tracking, microchipping and DNA testing.

On the day of the exhibition I was keen to raise awareness of the cockatoos and the threats they're facing. A lot of people were very surprised that Carnaby's are endangered, as they see large flocks of them. I explained that these groups are now significantly smaller than they used to be. One of my teachers has also taken action and is putting nesting boxes up in her bushland property. The exhibition was a lot of work but it was fantastic to tell people about all the things I had learnt!

Tom Ayres (age 11)



Photo: K. Ayres

Year 6 student Tom Ayres presenting the findings of his exhibition about 'How is technology influencing Carnaby's Black Cockatoo'

Tales aplenty at Newdegate

The Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo project focused in the south east Wheatbelt ran a stall at the Newdegate Field Days last month. Our aim was to increase awareness of the species in the area and to gather as much information as possible about any feeding or breeding habitat for Carnaby's that landholders may have on their properties. Project officers Deb Sullivan and Sandra Gilfillan had many people from around WA and interstate stopping at the stall to regale tales about cockatoos, from Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos in Victoria, to a Carnaby's chick that was rescued from a felled tree and kept as a pet in the "old" days. This latter tale suggested that Carnaby's can be taught to talk!

An interesting tale was relayed to us by one local about a farm in the area just north west of Newdegate, which was then owned by the brother of Ivan Carnaby, the naturalist who collected the type specimen of Carnaby's Cockatoo in 1948. Carnaby suggested that the White-tailed Black-Cockatoo in the Lake Grace district of Western Australia was a subspecies of *Calyptorhynchus baudinii*, due to differences of bill shape, describing the shorter-billed form as race *latirostris* from a specimen collected at Hopetoun. He later formally named it *C. b. latirostris* (Carnaby 1948). This subspecies is now considered as the separate species we now know as Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo or the Short-billed White-tailed Black-Cockatoo (*C. latirostris*).

The farm is now owned by Geoff and Jill Duckworth and still has quite extensive area of bush left, plus the original Carnaby's house, but they sadly no longer see the cockatoos on the farm.

The Field Days proved a success for the project with many locals being made aware of the plight of Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos and the privilege of having them breeding "in their backyard", plus the importance of conserving these iconic birds.

Sandra Gilfillan



Photo: D. Sullivan

Senior Project Officer Sandra Gilfillan manning the project stall at Newdegate

Steps to Recovery DVD

Have you heard about BirdLife Western Australia's very own film?

Steps to Recovery is the story of the Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo Recovery Project by renowned wildlife filmmaker Leighton De Barros. The film documents people on the ground working directly with the cockatoos and provides you an insight into the character of these larrikins of the bird world!

Steps to Recovery was produced in memory of Jean Armstrong. Jean was for many years a keen member of Birds Australia and the Busselton Naturalists Club. Jean will long be remembered for her kindness and passion for nature.

As a Cockie Notes subscriber you are eligible for a free copy of the DVD. Use it to promote the plight of Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo to your friends and community.

Contact BirdLife Western Australia on (08) 9383 7749 or wa@birdlife.org.au, by 31st December leaving your name and postal address. DVDs will be posted out from late January 2013.



The cocky conservation team

Matt Fossey, Threatened Cockatoos Project Manager

Matt currently manages our Carnaby's projects and will be helping to expand our work to include all threatened cockatoos in the south west. Any general enquiries can be directed to him. matt.fossey@birdlife.org.au or (08) 9287 2251

Tamara Kabat, Black-Cockatoo Conservation Officer

Tam works on our project in the Perth region and also coordinates the Great Cocky Count. Contact Tam about getting involved, or if you work with a group interested in on-ground work for cockies. tamara.kabat@birdlife.org.au or (08) 9287 2204

Sandra Gilfillan, Senior Carnaby's Conservation Officer

Sandra is based in Albany and works with Deb Sullivan on our project in the south east Wheatbelt. Contact Sandra if you're a farmer, or work in local government or NRM and are interested in participating in this project.

sandra.gilfillan@birdlife.org.au or (08) 9842 0003

Deb Sullivan, Carnaby's Conservation Officer

Deb is based in Esperance and works with Sandra Gilfillan on our project in the south east Wheatbelt. Contact Deb if you're a farmer, or work in local government or NRM and are interested in participating in this project.

deb.sullivan@birdlife.org.au or (08) 9076 2203

Cheryl Gole, WA Program Manager

Cheryl is the Perth-based manager for BirdLife Australia's WA funded projects, including our cockatoo program. Contact Cheryl for questions about the program.

cheryl.gole@birdlife.org.au or 0428 934 958



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