

# Cocky Notes

Issue 25: Winter 2017

## MAKING COCKIES GREAT AGAIN!

The Great Cockey Count was an outstanding success again this year. On Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> April, 894 volunteers registered to help our annual survey for black-cockatoos. When you consider that many people bring a friend along, this equates to over 4,000 person hours. What an incredible effort and thanks go to all those involved. Together, 469 roost sites were surveyed, from Chapman Valley in the north, to Albany in the south and Condingup in the east.

The count continues to set records on most fronts, tallying up:

17,457 White-tailed Black-Cockatoos at 124 occupied roosts,

2,989 Forest Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos at 95 occupied roosts,

It was also a record count in regional areas, with 5,029 White-taileds counted at 55 occupied roosts.

These numbers mean that we counted approximately 30% of all Black-Cockatoos in the South West of Western Australia on a single night!



The survey team at the mega roost site in Yanchep. Photo: John Clarke

The 'mega roost' was still active, with 3,528 Carnaby's flying in to roost at the same site as last year (east of Yanchep National Park in the pine plantation). This year 73% of all Carnaby's counted on the Swan Coastal Plain roosted within 1km of the Gngara/Yanchep/Pinjar pine plantations. This is higher than previous years and once again highlights the critical importance of this roosting and food resource to this endangered species.

Red-tails seem to be continuing to expand their numbers on the coastal plain. This year 1,934 were counted roosting in the area compared to just 771 last year. This is good evidence that the birds are not only going there to feed (on Cape Lilac and more), but they are staying overnight.

Many volunteers were disappointed at getting zero counts. BirdLife do our best to avoid this but it is unfortunately inevitable as cockies change roost sites depending on various factors. We are trying to weed out sites in our database which may have been erroneously identified as night roosts (many turn out to be day roosts/forage areas). We will continue this process and welcome feedback and local knowledge. The proof we are getting better at this is in the table below.

Percentage of all sites surveyed which were occupied by White-tailed, Red-tailed Black-cockatoos, or both

| 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 28%  | 36%  | 31%  | 31%  | 34%  | 29%  | 38%  | 42%  |

Next year we hope to hit 50%, which means that for every volunteer who gets a zero there will be one who gets cockies roosting.

GCC 2018 will be on Sunday April 8, save the date!

Adam Peck,  
Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo  
Project Coordinator

## CITIZENS ARE DOING IT FOR THEMSELVES! (AND FOR THE BIRDS)

Quite often in Cocky Notes we share updates of research projects whose findings help us better protect our black-cockatoos. This issue we wanted to give a big shout out to members of the community that are leading the charge in conserving our black-cockatoos. Around the world, communities aren't waiting for governments to make the change, but are leading the charge in grassroots changes that are having a big impact.

### PLANT A BANKSIA CAMPAIGN



Volunteers from ECU's WildCampus celebrate the planting of lots of cockatoo food! Photo: Karl Zwickl

As Perth continues to sprawl, native Banksia woodland on the Swan Coastal Plain disappears. Yet these woodlands are a critical food resource for Carnaby's, providing nectar, seed and insects to support them and other native birds. To help combat this loss, generous cockatoo supporters donated over \$15 000 to grow Banksia seedlings for urban plantings across the city. From this generous donation, twenty three community groups across the greater Perth region were able to include more cockatoo-friendly Banksias into their revegetation efforts, providing more food for black-cockatoos across the metropolitan area.

One of the hard-working recipients was the dedicated WildCampus volunteer group at Edith Cowan University, who put their seedlings in the ground recently, as seen in the photo above.

### DON'T MAKE THEM GO EXTINCT!

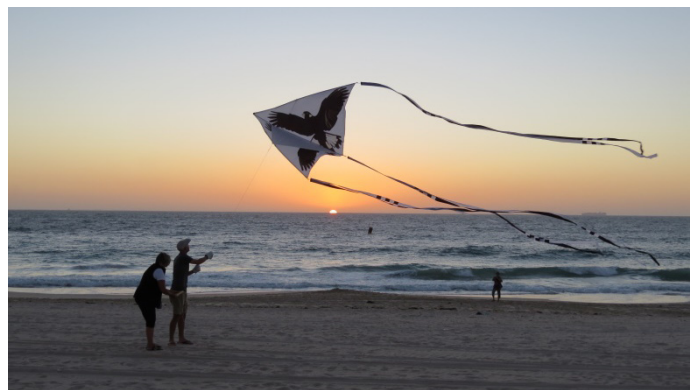
In the lead-up to the state election in March, cockatoo advocates were very vocal in ensuring that our native species had their voices heard by our elected officials. A postcard campaign was used to highlight the habitat destruction threatening Carnaby's Black-cockatoo in the greater Perth region. The volunteers, joined by BirdLife Australia's CEO Paul Sullivan, handed around 25,000 signatures to the Office of the Premier. The campaign is ongoing, calling for sensible environmental policy.



On the steps of Parliament House, volunteers have a message for our politicians. Photo: Tegan Douglas

### FLYING A KITE FOR CARNABY'S

Fifty years ago, flocks of several thousand Carnaby's Black-cockatoos were a regular sight in the Perth metropolitan area. Today, flocks of a hundred are big enough to cause a stir. To remind us of what we have lost, the Carnaby's Community Action Group has been hard at work raising awareness of the plight facing Carnaby's – using kites! They are using flocks of black-cockatoo kites to remind us of the flocks of actual Carnaby's that used to cover our skies. A fundraiser earlier this year allowed the purchase of an enormous 3m Carnaby's kite, and supporters were able to buy t-shirts and their own kites. The big Carnaby's kite has been flying at farmers markets and local events across the Perth area, keeping the profile of Carnaby's in the public eye (it even has its own Instagram account! @carnabys\_kite). So, if you see someone flying a black-cocky kite, stop and congratulate them on raising awareness of our native species.

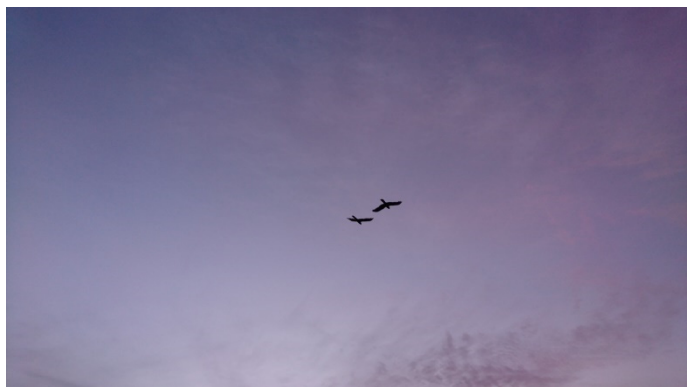


The Carnaby's Kite floats gracefully in the setting sun. Photo: Helen Bryant



## SECOND TIME LUCKY

The wind whispered through the tops of the trees, and carried with it, the distant call of Baudin's Black-cockatoos. As the minutes passed, the calls got louder, until pairs and small flocks of black-silhouettes could be seen drifting through the gaps in the trees.



Two Baudin's wing their way to their evening roost site.  
Photo: Tegan Douglas.

It was May, and we were at Moingup Springs, in Stirling Range National Park, just before sunset. We were there to assist with the release of seven rehabilitated Baudin's Black-cockatoos back into the wild. Amongst them was Lucky, so-called because he was extremely lucky to survive the shotgun blast that brought him crashing to the ground in Bridgetown in February 2016, his little body peppered with shotgun pellets.

But Lucky was found, still alive, and was brought into care. X-rays revealed the full extent of his injuries, and what followed was an intensive rehabilitation effort. Together with a small flock of his feathered friends, victims of carstrike and other negative interactions with humans, Lucky rebuilt his strength in the flight aviaries at Kaarakin Black-Cockatoo Conservation Centre. While he was being nursed back to health, volunteers were on the lookout for a suitable flock for him to be released in to – and decided on the group at Moingup. Once the vets had given Lucky the final okay, he and his fellows were carefully placed in individual pet-packs and transported southwards. Volunteers had carefully identified and monitored several sites in case the resident flock at Moingup didn't show and an alternative release site was needed.

But the birds were there. In small groups they glided in, calling to each other as they prepared to settle in for the night. At the signal, the pet packs were opened, and seven cockatoos spread their wings to join their wild comrades.

In less than a minute it was over – the cumulation of months of hard work. To get these seven birds back into to the wild took a massive effort, involving staff and volunteers from Kaarakin, Perth Zoo, Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, WWF, BirdLife Australia and numerous individuals.

For a threatened species, every single bird is important. Some of Lucky's release mates are continuing to teach us about the species, as they had been fitted with transmitters as part of Murdoch University's Black-cockatoo Ecology Project. Good luck Lucky and friends!



Lucky (top) leads the charge as he and the rest of his fellow rehabilitated Baudin's (bottom) take flight.  
Photo: Tegan Douglas.

Tegan Douglas

### KEEP UP WITH THE FLOCK!

The Southwest Black-Cockatoo Recovery Program is on social media! Keep up to date with all the latest happenings:



Southwest Black-Cockatoo Recovery Program



@blackcockatoos

## NESTBOX NOTES

In April this year, BirdLife ran a handful of nestbox workshops in the Porongurups, in partnership with Simon Cherriman of Insight Ornithology, Great Southern Science Council, Southcoast NRM and Friends of Porongurup Range. Volunteers got to see first-hand what considerations go in to designing, installing, and maintaining nestboxes, and then had the satisfaction of providing hands on help for threatened species themselves. Nestboxes are a common topic in cockatoo conservation, so we wanted to share some of the information from the event.



Participants worked together to construct cockatoo nestboxes, led by Simon Cherriman.

All three species of southwest black-cockatoo nest in tree hollows, and as they are large birds they need big hollows, in old trees. These are precious real estate. Unfortunately lots of things are making suitable hollows scarce – competition from invasive species like feral bees, frequent fires taking out hollow-bearing trees, understorey disturbance removing the next generation of trees, as well as broad-scale land clearing. All these combine to mean that there are areas where there is a shortage of natural hollows for cockies to nest in. However cockatoos are very faithful to breeding locations, and move seasonally around the landscape, so nestboxes installed in known breeding areas are the ones most likely to be successful.

So, while putting up artificial hollows can definitely help, it is not the silver bullet solution. In most areas general loss of habitat is having a more widespread effect on things that a cockatoo needs every day – like food, water, and roost sites. BirdLife generally recommends that if you want to take some cockatoo-friendly actions, addressing all of these will give a better result for the birds.

### Did you know that nestboxes need regular maintenance?

While they might look pretty sturdy, being out in the weather year-round, and being used by big, burly black-cockatoos can leave a nestbox pretty battered. Right now is the perfect time to inspect nest boxes, and conduct any necessary repairs, ready for the breeding season. Consider the following things:

- Is the box still attached in a sturdy place, where it gets some shade?
- Is the box still held together well?
- Is there sufficient leaf litter in the bottom of the box?
- Are the sacrificial chewing posts still intact?
- Have feral bees taken over the hollow?



Simon expertly manoeuvres the hollow into position.



Installing nestboxes in the karri forest can give you a crick in the neck!

For more information about what you can do on your patch to help black-cockatoos, have a look at our booklet *Black-Cockatoos and our Property*, online at <http://www.birdlife.org.au/documents/swbc-BCs-and-your-property.pdf>, or from the BirdLife WA office (08 9383 7749).

Photos and text by Tegan Douglas



## THE SECOND LARGEST CARNABY'S ROOST IN THE STATE: BULLDOZED

Despite being assured that no known black-cockatoo roosts in Perth's pine plantations would be cleared, BirdLife was appalled to learn that the second largest Carnaby's roost site in the Perth region, in the Pinjar pine plantation, had been cleared. BirdLife is calling for an immediate halt on clearing in the pines until the government can assure communities that proper communication ensures this won't happen again. The full story can be seen at: <http://www.communitynews.com.au/wanneroo-times/news/birdlife-australia-worried-about-clearing-of-carnabys-black-cockatoo-habitat-in-pinjar-pine-plantation/> and you can add your voice at <https://www.change.org/p/premier-stop-logging-critical-habitat-on-crown-land>

## A BENEFICIAL RELATIONSHIP

When cockatoos nip off flowering Banksia cones, it may seem a bit counter-intuitive – the birds appear to be removing a potential source of seed before it has even grown! However, there is often more to it than meets the eye. Kevin Collins, of the Banksia Farm in Mount Barker, kindly took BirdLife for a tour of his property to demonstrate this.

Seeds form the biggest part of black-cockatoo diet, and it is most often the seeds of Banksia we see them eating. Cockies take fully-developed seeds from cones when the fluffy Banksia blossom has dried and turned brown, or fallen off the cone altogether.

But black-cockatoos are often seen feeding on Banksias while they are flowering. While they feed on the nectar, they are also on the hunt for grubs. The grubs burrow through the centre of the cone, and the cockies break it open to extract the grubs. The pictures below show one of the grubs nestled in the centre of a cone, and the tell-tale hollow through the centre of a flowering Banksia cone where a grub has been. While the birds tear apart the cones in the process and it makes them look quite wasteful, this removal of grubs provides not only a source of protein for the birds, but benefits the Banksias through removing pests.



A grub in a flowering Banksia (left), and the damaged woody centre of a Banksia cone where a grub has burrowed (right). Photo: Tegan Douglas



## WE NEED YOUR HELP!

Nobody knows your local patch better than you do. So, if BirdLife WA wants to find out more about changes to the local environment in the southwest, who better to ask than the locals?

That's the thinking behind our new Community Wisdom survey – we want to know what changes you have noticed in the black-cockatoo populations in your local area in the time you've been living there.

We're trying to get as many people from throughout the southwest to participate – can you join us? You don't need to be a bird expert – just a local! Ask your neighbours and family to participate too – we're trying to get as many people as possible to tell us what they see.

The survey can be filled out online – visit <http://www.birdlife.org.au/projects/southwest-black-cockatoo-recovery/community-wisdom-swbc> . If you would prefer a paper copy for yourself, or someone you know, get in touch and let us know. You can call the BirdLife WA office on (08) 9383 7749, or email [wa@birdlife.org.au](mailto:wa@birdlife.org.au) and we will send one out to you.



## HAD A CHANGE OF ROOST?

If your home or email address changes, or if you don't want to receive Cocky Notes in the future, please let us know at [wa@birdlife.org.au](mailto:wa@birdlife.org.au).

## THE COCKY CONSERVATION TEAM

### To be announced soon: Southwest Black-Cockatoo Project Coordinator

As Tegan Douglas switches roles, a new Southwest Black-cockatoo Project Coordinator will be joining the team very soon. In the meantime, still continue to contact Tegan if you know where these species feed, roost for the night, drink or nest, at [tegan.douglas@birdlife.org.au](mailto:tegan.douglas@birdlife.org.au) or (08) 9287 2716.

### Adam Peck, Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo Project Coordinator

Adam works on all things Carnaby's-related - from running the Great Cocky Count, to coordinating black-cockatoo breeding season surveys, raising awareness to making sure the voices of our cockatoos are heard. If you would like to volunteer to assist with these projects or if you know where Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos feed, drink, nest or roost for the night please contact [carnabys@birdlife.org.au](mailto:carnabys@birdlife.org.au) or (08) 9287 2251.

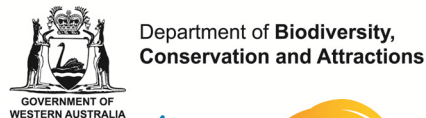
## Helen Bryant, WA Program Manager

Helen is the Perth-based manager for BirdLife Australia's WA funded projects, including the cockatoo program. Contact Helen for questions about the program, at [helen.bryant@birdlife.org.au](mailto:helen.bryant@birdlife.org.au) or (08) 9287 2204.

## TEGAN SPREADS HER WINGS

Tegan Douglas, who has been coordinating the Cockies in Crisis project with BirdLife WA for the last two years, is sadly leaving the cocky club. While she will be continuing to work for BirdLife WA, she will be in a different role, working for all of our native birds, not just black-cockatoos. She will be our new Citizen Science Development Coordinator, helping communities to develop citizen science projects to monitor their favourite local areas, as well as building bird and survey skills across the state. She has immensely enjoyed her time working with our forest black-cockatoos, and with you. Meeting cockatoo advocates throughout the southwest, and seeing people convey the passion they have for our native birds has been a real highlight. She finds it inspiring hearing about the journeys that people take as they restore and conserve habitat for our feathered friends, and looks forward to working with you all into the future.

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## Australia's voice for birds since 1901

BirdLife Australia is dedicated to achieving outstanding conservation results for our native birds and their habitats.

With our specialised knowledge and the commitment of an Australia-wide network of volunteers and supporters, we are creating a bright future for Australia's birds.

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Contributing your time is one of the most effective ways to help

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Help us create positive outcomes for birds and their habitats