Cocky Notes

Issue 28: Summer 2018/19

Sweetie bringing food to his mate near their nest
Photo: Kayley Griffiths

SWEETIE'S STORY

Kayley Griffiths and husband Andrew have long taken a keen interest in Black-Cockatoo conservation. They saw the value of artificial hollows early on, saying "we saw them trying to make nests in hollows but they had bees, galahs or corellas in them, which can be aggressive. The black-cockatoos' reproductive rate has been very low because they don't have hollows to nest in". Their property in Mundaring now houses twelve artificial hollows. They've had great success, fledging many chicks over the years, some of which have been banded by DBCA staff.

In 2014 a male Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo was picked up injured in Stratton. Taken to the Perth Zoo for treatment, x-rays showed a shotgun pellet lodged just millimetres behind his left eye. From his numbered leg band, Perth Zoo staff could identify him – his name was Sweetie, and he had been banded as a placid nestling from the Griffith's property the previous year.

Fortunately, Sweetie made a full recovery. He was transferred to Kaarakin Black-Cockatoo Conservation Centre and released back to the wild in June 2015. In March 2016 he was bonded with a female. In 2017 he was spotted with a chick in tow. The best news is that he has bred successfully in one of Kayley's artificial hollows this year. Not only has he survived his brush with death, but he has gone on to pass his resilient genes to future generations.

This amazing story highlights a few things. Firstly it shows the value of rescuing injured birds, even the gravely injured. Black-Cockatoos have very slow reproductive rates, so any rehabilitated birds which can go on to breed are of great value. Sweetie is the first rehab bird known to have bred in the wild. It shows the great work that Perth Zoo, Kaarakin and other rehabilitation centres are doing to save Black-Cockatoos. The 500th bird cared for by Perth Zoo was recently released!

It also demonstrates that artificial hollows can be beneficial if put in the right location, are well designed, maintained and monitored. This year nine chicks fledged at Kayley's (seven Carnaby's and two Forest Red-tailed)! Sweetie's current chick is the first 'grandchild' from Kayley's place and Sweetie's parents are currently raising a chick in an adjacent hollow.

The darker side of the story is the shooting of an endangered species. This used to be common practice, as orchardists tried to protect their crops from Carnaby's and Baudin's. But since the 1980's it is a criminal offence to shoot Black-Cockatoos, but old habits die hard and some orchardists continue to shoot birds. This is despite research clearly showing that netting crops eliminates any crop loss.

Lastly it shows the value of banding birds. If Sweetie had not been banded we would not know his incredible story in full. Stories of hope like this inspire people to keep working on the conservation of these beautiful birds. Let's hope Sweetie goes on to live a long life and raise many more chicks.

Sweetie's leg band can be seen on his right leg
Photo: Kayley Griffiths

Adam Peck
Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo Project Coordinator

INAUGURAL NATIONAL BLACK-COCKATOO FORUM

In November 2018 the inaugural National Black-Cockatoo Forum was held in Melbourne. Over two thought-provoking days cockatoo experts from all over Australia - researchers, community groups and government employees gathered to work together and share knowledge about black-cockatoo conservation. Panels discussed population monitoring, breeding, feeding habitat monitoring and management, nest supplementation, tracking, health, community engagement and citizen science.

Key messages from the forum included:

- Understanding the ecology and habitat requirements of the population is key to effective management

- Artificial nest boxes are not a fix-all solution and shouldn't be the first step in species recovery. Poorly-designed or -maintained nest boxes can become death traps or support undesirable species. Trees with natural hollows on the other hand, provide not only hollows, but food, perches for roosting, and many resources for other species and the environment as a whole.

- 'Habitat ain't habitat' - Our conservation efforts need to be informed by the habits of the birds we are trying to conserve. Research on preferential feeding trees of the Kangaroo Island Glossy Black-Cockatoo identified 'Glossies' favour food from trees growing on slightly acidic soils over the same species of food tree growing on less acidic soil.

- Technology is assisting cockatoo conservation like never before. Bio-acoustic analysis of Glossy calls helps monitor breeding success, image recognition software can identify individual birds, and radio tracking records movements of individuals and flocks.

- Community involvement is critical to black-cockatoo conservation. Black-cockatoos range over such large areas that so much more can be achieved when everyone is working together to protect black-cockatoos and their habitat.

Rebecca Boyland
Forest Black-Cockatoo Project Coordinator

Left: Attendees of the First National Black Cockatoo forum. Representing the Black-Cockatoos of Southwest Australia were Rebecca Boyland (BirdLife), Adam Peck (BirdLife), Linda Borrison (Carnaby's Cockatoo Action Group (CCAG)), Christine Groom (UWA & CCAG), Erika Roper (UWA), Francis Smit (Landcare SJ), Peter Mawson (DBCA) and Ron Johnstone (WA Museum)
Photo supplied by: Daniella Teixeira

During the Black-Cockatoo forum, participants put together the following call for action:

"I remember when the skies used to be full of them"

Black-Cockatoos are Australian icons. They are a treasured and spectacular part of our landscapes right across the continent. But every single species of Black-Cockatoo is either threatened, or has a population that is threatened, with extinction.

On 8th and 9th November 2018, 45 participants met for the first National Black-Cockatoo Forum. They came together to share their collective experience, hard-earned insights and passion for this spectacular and threatened group of birds.

Our two days of discussion underscored starkly the urgency of the challenge: we must do more if we are to secure these birds in our national landscape for future generations of Australians. We affirm:

- *The common plight of Black-Cockatoos across Australia and their significance for many Australians*
- *Past and ongoing loss of nesting and feeding habitat, inappropriate fire and nest predation threaten many Black-Cockatoos with extinction*
- *Drier conditions and more wildfire associated with a changing climate are already being observed and are exacerbating this risk*
- *Commitment to investment in habitat protection, management and restoration across the landscapes where Black-Cockatoos live is essential, but scarce funding for crucial recovery actions is drying up.*

Forum participants call for:

1) *Adequate funding of recovery actions for all listed Black-Cockatoos*
2) *Assessment of suspected declines of other Black-Cockatoo species and populations*
3) *Protection of the essential habitats for all listed and declining Black-Cockatoos.*

Participants commit to continue to share insights and collaborate with one another and with the local communities who cherish these iconic Australian birds. We will make every effort count to ensure the Black-Cockatoos continue to grace our skies.

COCKYWATCH UPDATE

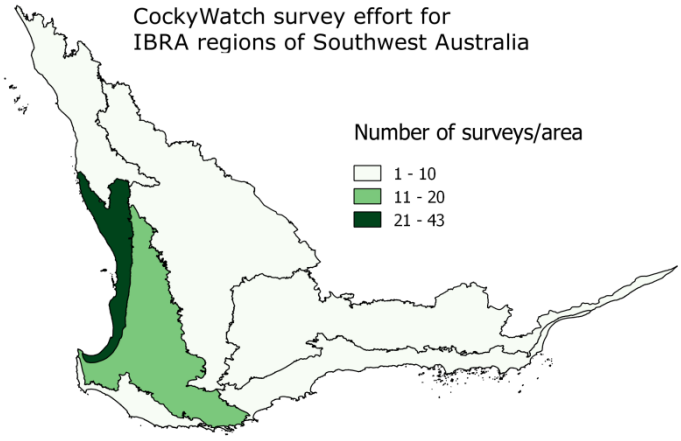
We launched BirdLife's CockyWatch project at the start of 2018 and we've had a great response. 145 surveys had been completed over 110 transects by the start of December, and I wanted to share some of the initial findings with you.

One of the important things CockyWatch was designed to do was to account for differences in habitat - i.e. that it's easier for us to see and hear these birds in the open habitat of the Wheatbelt than in the tall and closed habitat of the Jarrah forest. To better understand the survey results, we categorise the survey results by their "IBRA" regions. IBRA stands for Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation for Australia and it's a classification system that divides Australia down into geographically distinct bioregions based on common climate, geology, landform, native vegetation and species.

Australia can be divided into 89 bioregions and the Southwest black-cockatoos range over seven of these: the Geraldton Sandplains, Swan Coastal Plain, Jarrah Forest, Avon Wheatbelt, Mallee, Esperance Plains and the Warren.

58 CockyWatch surveys have been completed on the Swan Coastal Plain, 22 have been carried out in the Jarrah Forest and 35 surveys cross more than one IBRA region.

As you can see from the map, it would be wonderful to receive more surveys from the Geraldton Sandplains, Avon Wheatbelt, Mallee, Esperance Plains and the Warren. Which IBRA Region do you live in? Why not think about doing a monthly CockyWatch survey?



Map of IBRA regions of Southwest Australia showing the number of surveys submitted for each region.
Image: Rebecca Boyland

A flock of Forest Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos on the wing
Photo: Keith Lightbody

Just over a third of the surveys we've received (37%) have recorded cockatoos with 255 sightings across those surveys. While at first glance 37% may seem like a low number, it's actually essential for us to receive data sheets from surveys in which no cockatoos were seen. Along with surveys in which cockatoos have been seen, these surveys help us understand which areas of the landscape the cockatoos visit (and which ones they don't) over different times of the year.
One of our wonderful participants, Christine Wilder from Margaret River, has completed the same transect 16 times. Christine fits CockyWatch into her life by completing the survey on a regular trip that she makes to a nearby town. Having the same patch of road surveyed regularly throughout the year like this really helps us to see how Cockatoos use the landscape and different regions over time.

It's not too late to take part and help contribute to our understanding of habits and movements of black-cockatoos. If you're anywhere within Australia's Southwest corner (from north of Geraldton to east of Esperance) you can take part.

To start your CockyWatch survey journey, head to birdlife.org.au/cockywatch to download the instructions and simple-to-use datasheet.

A HUGE thank you to everyone who has taken part so far!

Rebecca Boyland
Forest Black-Cockatoo Project Coordinator

FAST FOOD FOR COCKATOOS

Do you know what Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos eat? Seeds. Unlike Carnaby's and Baudin's which also feed on flowers, nectar and grubs, Red-tails almost exclusively feed on seeds. In the Jarrah forest, where Red-tails traditionally live, their diet consists mainly of Marri and Jarrah seeds, supplemented with a few other seeds when available.

Around the year 2000, some Forest Red-tails were first observed in urban Perth on the Swan Coastal Plain. While it is likely that a search for water during the drought triggered the move, it was food that made them stay. Urban areas are filled with a multitude of tree species, both native and exotic, that are planted in parks, gardens and on street verges, any of which could be a potential food resource to an ingenious cockatoo. The urban Red-tails have learned to exploit these new food resources and are thriving in Perth.

Numbers of Red-tails seen in urban areas have drastically increased over the past few years as more and more individuals and family groups learn about the resources available in the city. One of the main urban food resources on the Plain for the Red-tails are the seeds of the Cape Lilac tree. Every year when the Cape Lilac trees produce fruit, flocks of Red-tails descend on the trees and strip them bare, leaving a mess in their wake.

This is not to say that the cockatoos had to move to the city for food. Natural food is abundant in the Jarrah Forest—there are Marri and Jarrah nuts galore! The cockatoos just appear to like city food better, especially Cape Lilac.

Cape Lilac provides a predictable food supply that is available for most of the year (Jan-Oct). However, the recent increase in urban Red-tail numbers has altered the availability of the Cape Lilac seed. Today, most of the Cape Lilac is consumed by winter and the Red-tails must return to the forest to feed. When compared to traditional foods like Marri, Cape Lilac is also much faster and more efficient for the Red-tails to eat. In the time it takes for a cockatoo to process a marri nut and eat the seeds, it could have eaten 25 Cape Lilac seeds! It is also highly likely that Cape Lilac is much higher in energy than their traditional foods, as the seeds are very oily. However, the impacts of feeding on Cape Lilac on birds' body condition, health and breeding potential is presently unknown and it is always best for birds to feed on a varied diet of primarily native food plants. This research is still underway, so stay tuned for the results!

You can keep up-to-date by following me on Twitter @_erikaroper, on Facebook facebook.com/UrbanCockatoos, or at my blog parrottracks.wordpress.com.

Erika Roper
PhD Candidate at University of Western Australia

Forest Red-tails far from their natural forest homes, feeding on a Cape Lilac tree in suburban Coolbellup
Photo: Erika Roper

GRANTS FOR COCKIES!

BirdLife Australia has recently secured funding for several cocky projects. The first is a 3-year, $420,000 grant from the Alcoa Foundation. The 'Alcoa Community Cockatoo Recovery' project has three main goals:

1. Educate and engage local communities to help Black-Cockatoos;
2. Continue our important citizen-science monitoring projects such as the Great Cocky Count and CockyWatch;
3. Restore much needed habitat (native foods and nests) for black-cockatoos between Kwinana, Mandurah, Jarrahdale and Harvey.

Lotterywest is supporting BirdLife (with funds of $576,000 over 3 years) to 'Connect Urban Communities with Nature'. We will work with councils and the community in Joondalup and Cockburn to improve habitat condition and connectivity for all native birds including cockatoos.

BirdLife has also received two small grants from the State NRM Office. One aims to better understand Rainbow Lorikeets ($20,000), an introduced species to WA, and how they compete with black-cockatoos and local parrots for hollows. The other grant will call on citizens in Perth and the Peel region to report urban trees used by black-cockatoos to feed, rest and breed ($22,000). It's hoped this data will be used by government in conservation planning.

Vicki Stokes
WA Program Manager

2019 GREAT COCKY COUNT - Registrations for the 2019 Great Cocky Count are now open! This year the Count will be held on Sunday, April 7th, at sunset and we need your help to make it bigger & better than last year. Register online at: http://goo.gl/forms/ifBRO05YktIbk2QX2

CARNABY'S BREEDING SURVEYS

The 2018 breeding surveys had some mixed results.

There were some notable successes close to Perth. At ECU Joondalup five of eight artificial hollows were occupied (including one with 2 chicks), along with one in a nearby reserve. A reserve in Mandurah had three Carnaby's and one Forest Red-tailed nesting in artificial hollows, along with one in Baldivis. A private property in Mundaring with twelve artificial hollows had seven Carnaby's and two Forest Red-tailed nesting (see Sweetie's story). This shows that 'cockatubes' can be beneficial in certain urban areas, although other areas like Murdoch University have recently had no success.

Volunteers and staff surveyed 663 hollows, with 96 of 494 natural hollows occupied (19%) and 43 of 169 artificial hollows occupied (25%). Some sites with good breeding results in the past recorded very little breeding. This may be due to timing. By all reports 2018 was a very late year, so most surveys took place later than normal. Unfortunately some birds obviously decided to breed earlier and this meant that breeding had largely finished before the surveys at a few sites.

In November BirdLife staff visited Cocanarup Timber Reserve near Ravensthorpe. A dedicated team of local volunteers has been surveying the area for many years. Cocanarup is probably the most important Carnaby's breeding site in the south of WA. This year 46 of 109 nests checked were occupied. Considering the team has probably only been able to survey less than half the nests this means there could be over 100 breeding pairs in the area! Unfortunately large tracts of the reserve are pegged for lithium mining. There will be a concerted effort by BirdLife and others to save this valuable habitat if the mines seek approval to clear.

A huge thank you goes out to all our volunteers and land owners who gave us access to their land.

Adam Peck
Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo Project Coordinator

A pair of Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos
Photo: Keith Lightbody

Adam Peck using a telescopic pole to check nest hollows for signs of breeding. Photo: Rebecca Boyland

DO YOU HAVE A MEMORY OF CARNABY'S BLACK-COCKATOOS?

The Carnaby's Community Action Group (CCAG), who brought you the 'Carnaby's Meeting Place' kite-flying event at the 2018 Sculpture by the Sea, are now planning their next project.

This time we want to capture on video memories of when Carnaby's Black Cockatoos filled the skies. We want to then release the stories on various social media platforms and we are planning on entering a compilation of interviews into local film festivals.

The aim of the project is to emphasise the decline of the Carnaby's and the need to prevent them becoming extinct. We all want our great-grandchildren to share the same joy that we have had of seeing Carnaby's grace our skies.

If you are interested in being part of this project, please email the CCAG on carnabyscag@gmail.com with your name, contact details and a one sentence overview of your Carnaby's memory.

We will be back in touch with you over the coming weeks.

Linda Borrison
Carnaby's Cockatoo Action Group member

THE COCKY CONSERVATION TEAM

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 and raising awareness to make 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 adam.peck@birdlife.org.au or (08) 9287 2251.

Rebecca Boyland, Forest Black-Cockatoo Project Coordinator

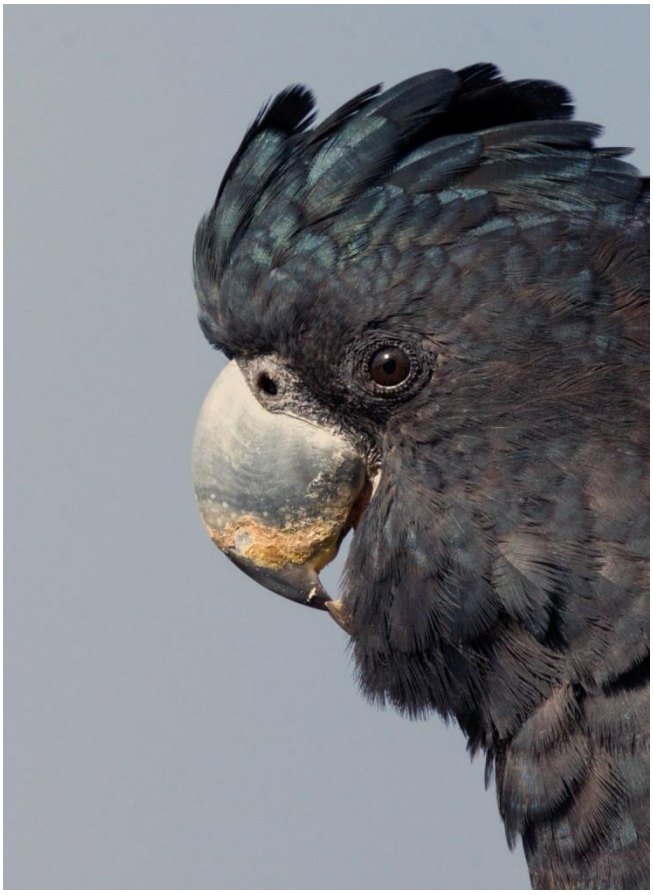
Rebecca works on the two species of Southwest Forest Black-Cockatoos, the Red-tailed and Baudin's. She has a number of projects on the go, including the new citizen science project CockyWatch. You can contact Rebecca if you want to get involved with CockyWatch, or if you know where these species feed, roost for the night, drink or nest, at rebecca.boyland@birdlife.org.au or (08) 9287 2716.

Vicki Stokes, WA Program Manager

Vicki is our WA Program manager. She oversees all of BirdLife Australia's WA funded projects, including the Southwest Black-Cockatoo program. Contact Vicki for questions about the program at vicki.stokes@birdlife.org.au or (08) 9287 2204.

HAD A CHANGE OF ROOST?

If you've moved homes or changed email addresses, or if you don't want to receive Cocky Notes in the future, please let us know at wa@birdlife.org.au.



A juvenile female Forest Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo
Photo: Bill Howard

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