

Cocky Notes

Issue 29: Winter 2019

Conserving Cocanarup and its Carnaby's

The Cocanarup Timber Reserve lies approximately 15 km south-west of Ravensthorpe and encompasses 9,000 ha of native vegetation, including a large expanse of mature salmon gum woodland. It lies at the heart of some 65,000 ha of high-conservation bushland stretching south to the Fitzgerald River National Park and east to the edge of the Ravensthorpe Range.

This landscape forms a critical link between the reserves of the south coast and the Great Western Woodlands. Further, it is known to have significant natural and cultural heritage values, some of which are clearly of national importance. Perhaps most importantly, the area is known to be one of the three most important breeding sites for the endangered and culturally-significant Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo, with in excess of 150 nest trees currently mapped.

However, lithium exploration is now placing this crucial Carnaby's habitat under immediate threat. Mining tenements cover much of the area, and recent exploration activity has left deep scars, including substantial negative impacts on known nest trees.



Female Carnaby's in a Salmon Gum hollow, Cocanarup Timber Reserve. Courtesy John Tucker

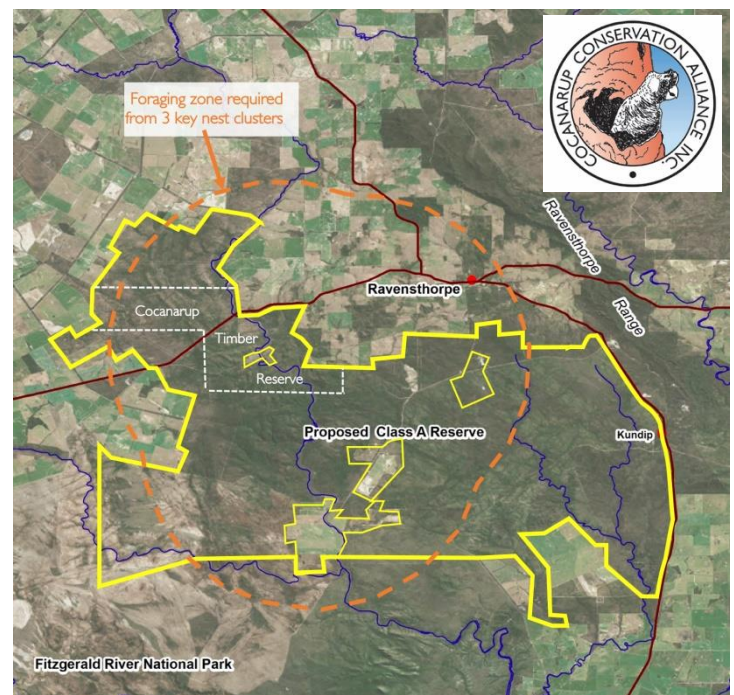
The recently-formed Cocanarup Conservation Alliance Inc. (CCA) is dedicated to the full protection

of the wider Cocanarup - Kundip area, beginning with the exclusion of all mining activities. Letters to the Premier and Minister for the Environment have extracted promises to "review the values of the area" and "investigate reservation of the area for conservation" - and as a result CCA has called for an immediate moratorium on exploration activity while this process is underway, an action wholeheartedly supported by BirdLife Australia.

CCA's longer-term goal is to have this whole area set aside as a Class A Reserve and included in The Fitzgerald River Key Biodiversity Area, which would protect nesting, foraging and roosting habitat for the south-eastern population of Carnaby's. To support CCA go to their website at:

www.cca.asn.au

You'll find an online membership form, and downloadable letters to the Ministers involved.



Jesse Brampton, CCA

Perspective: Cockies in Crisis

The Cockatoo Care project - a joint initiative of the Western Australian Museum and the Water Corporation - was launched by Harry Butler at the Wungong Dam on Threatened Species Day 2001. We realised that although there was a considerable amount of information known about Carnaby's Cockatoo, almost nothing was known about the forest-inhabiting Baudin's Cockatoo and the Forest Red-tailed Black Cockatoo. Details of their distribution (past and present), ecological status, relative abundance, habitat preferences, breeding biology, diet, migration and movements were almost non-existent.

Since that time we have been studying the breeding biology of all three species throughout the south-west of Western Australia. All of these cockatoos are endemic to the south-west corner of WA and all have declined greatly over the past 60 years.

Well what has this project achieved so far, and do we have optimism for the future?

- Largely as a result of this project, a recovery team has been established for the two forest species, Baudin's and Forest Red-tailed Black Cockatoos.
- Following our recent conservation advice to the Department of the Environment and Energy Baudin's Cockatoo had its status transferred from the Vulnerable category to the Endangered category in February 2018. This was hugely important as the long-term survival of this cockatoo is of great concern.
- Identifying and monitoring Baudin's Cockatoo breeding sites in northern Jarrah-Marri forest.
- Documenting the breeding biology and the distribution, status, movements and diet of the Forest Red-tailed Black Cockatoo and Baudin's Cockatoo in the south-west of WA.
- Identification of the importance of roosts and the development of techniques for counting birds at roosts to gain information on abundance and demography. These techniques are now used by other groups (e.g. BirdLife Australia, The Great Cocky Count).
- A policy on feral European honey bees initiated.
- The development of artificial nest hollows for cockatoos (in partnership with Serpentine-Jarrahdale Landcare). These have proved to be hugely successful, especially for Carnaby's Cockatoo in parts of wheatbelt affected by fire and competition with other species.
- Development of pole cameras and use of motion cameras for checking nest hollows and measuring their depth and width.
- Over 20 research papers dealing with everything from the birds' breeding biology to

the importance of veteran and stag trees, the impacts of feral bees.

- Determine patterns of migration, movements and changes in foraging ecology.



Tony Kirkby measuring a Carnaby's Cockatoo chick prior to banding (Kim Sarti)

The outcomes and spin-offs from this project have been, to say the least, quite outstanding. They encompass a range of both traditional museum research and field work, especially the identification of critical habitat that has led to on-ground conservation initiatives, the identification of threats to the species, a vast improvement in our understanding of their breeding biology, and essential data for the development of recovery plans. The combined impact of tree mortality and nest competitors on Baudin's Cockatoo and Forest Red-tailed Black cockatoos needs immediate action especially to reduce tree mortality and enhance tree regeneration within the Jarrah-Marri forest to avoid serious impact on hollow availability for the next 200 years.

Are we optimistic about the future for these cockies? The long-term survival of Baudin's Cockatoo and its forest relative the Forest Red-tailed Black Cockatoo is of increasing concern. Both were once very robust populations but have declined greatly in the past 60 years. Both have similar breeding requirements and there has been a general lack of recognition of the significance of their decline and changing status. The destruction and degradation of breeding and feeding habitat, the overexploitation of veteran trees, the impact of exotic species, the expansion of superabundant native species and the major impacts of fire and climate change place these birds at the crossroads.

For more information see www.cockatooocare.com.au

Ron Johnstone, Tony Kirkby & Kim Sarti, WA Museum

CockyWatch

CockyWatch is going really well, but we're still looking for more people to help with surveys. This project is helping to protect the Black-Cockatoos of Southwest Australia and their habitats, by helping us find out how many there are, and where their favourite haunts are. Surveys are easy to do. Any time you drive more than ten kilometres consider recording your start and stop details and details about any Black-Cockatoos you see, and then send us your counts as a *CockyWatch* survey. An instructional video and the data sheets can be found at <http://birdlife.org.au/cockywatch>.

We're currently working on a report which will present the results of the project from its trial in November 2017 up until to May 2019. Over that time, a total of 407 surveys were completed over 235 individual transects by 21 observers across Southwest Australia. We'll let you know when the report is ready. Unfortunately chance sightings of these birds can't be used as *CockyWatch* surveys, but can still be recorded in Birddata (<https://birddata.birdlife.org.au/>).

Rebecca Boyland
Forest Black-Cockatoo Project Coordinator

Remembering Merrill and Chris

Merril Halley and Chris Greenwood were founder members of our group known as the Carnaby's Cockatoo Action Group. We formed the group in 2016 following a BirdLife community meeting that highlighted the serious plight of the endangered Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo. Right from the start both Chris and Merrill's knowledge and passion for Carnaby's was very obvious. They were always in the forefront of any of our activities and our successful involvement in *Sculpture by the Sea* in 2018 was originally Chris' idea.

Through Merrill's work on the conservation of the Black-Flanked Rock Wallaby at WWF and Chris' work as a Communications Consultant in the private, public and NGO sectors worldwide, they both had a great love for nature. This love took them to some amazing places in WA and around the world. They often shared stories of their adventures with us at our meetings. The deaths of our two friends in so short a time has really shaken our close-knit little group. We had spent a lovely afternoon with Chris and Merrill just before Easter, flying our Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo themed kites. We all feel that it was a real privilege to know and work with Chris and Merrill and these two talented and likeable people will be sorely missed by everyone.

Linda Borrison, Christine Groom, Lynne Miles, Aidon and Laura Thomas



The Carnaby's Cockatoo Action Group (From left: Christine Groom, Merrill Halley, Aidon and Laura Thomas and Chris Underwood). Photo by Linda Borrison.

Alcoa Community Cockatoo Recovery Project Update

BirdLife's new Alcoa Foundation funded project has taken flight! In 2019 we planted 2,000 cocky food plants at seven properties, including Marlee and Hermitage Reserves in Mandurah and Kaarakin Sanctuary in Martin. These plants will start to provide food for our threatened Black-Cockatoos in about five years. The aim is to plant 27,000 cocky food plants over the life of the project (to mid-2021).

We have also installed twenty 'Cockatubes' (artificial hollows) in three areas: Lake Clifton, Serpentine-Jarrahdale and Harvey/Waroona. These are all installed on private property and will be monitored by the land owners. Artificial hollows have been very successful in some areas and will hopefully boost Black-Cockatoo breeding rates. The tubes are made by Landcare SJ and the design has been refined over the years for optimal breeding conditions. The Alcoa Community Recovery project intends to install up to 24 hollows over the next three years. If you own property in the project area please email carnabys@birdlife.org.au to get involved.



Cockatube installation, with Allan Elliott, Susan Overheu, Adam Peck, Rob McClymont and Francis Smit.

Great Cocky Count summary

The 2019 Great Cocky Count (GCC) was a success as always, with 752 registered volunteers surveying 397 sites between The Chapman Valley and Esperance. 54% of roosts were occupied: 96 by white-tailed, 85 by Forest Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos (FRTBC) and 34 by both. In total 22,647 white-tailed were counted (13,343 in the Swan Coastal Plain, 2,137 in the Perth Hills and 7,167 in the regions) and 6,104 FRTBC were recorded (3,499 in the Swan Coastal Plain, 1,816 in the Perth Hills and 789 in the regions). We estimate this equates to roughly 50% of all the cockies in southwest WA!

A number of interesting counts came in. The record for the most Forest Red-tailed roosting was again beaten, with a massive 837 counted in Floreat. The most easterly confirmed GCC roost was recorded in

Condungup (70km east of Esperance), with a count of 416 Carnaby's roosting in Blue Gums with pine plantations nearby. The 'mega roost' east of Yanchep was impressive again, but the roost has shifted to the south this year. This made the task of counting more problematic. Four teams were in the area, but in the end a single volunteer (Alisdair Bulloch) counted them all on his own. His count of 5,145 is the largest count by a single person in GCC history, so well done Alisdair. I now realise a larger team will be needed at this important site. We are still attempting to ascertain the exact roost location for this flock. It appears that some of the flock fly east to roost in remnant vegetation, a pattern which has not been seen in previous years. The importance of pine plantations for Carnaby's was clear again, with the four largest counts all recorded near the plantations north of Perth.

The GCC campouts were a success again. A large roost at Jurien Bay was surveyed by a team there and several roosts were surveyed at Cheyne's Beach, although there were few cockies in this area.

This year we received more anecdotal reports of roosts being disturbed by other birds. These included Ibis, Ravens and Corellas. Competition for roost sites is just a fact of life and birds will find alternative roosts, but it makes the work of surveying that much harder.

The GCC report will be published in spring and everyone on the Cocky Notes list will be notified (all GCC volunteers are put on this list). Thanks to all the volunteers and land owners involved, we couldn't do it without you!

Save the date: **Sunday April 5 2020** is the big day next year. We hope to see you then ☺

Adam Peck



Baudin's Black-Cockatoo, Keith Lightbody

Wally Kerkhof: the Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo's best friend

Wally has always been interested in nature, particularly birds. During the 60s and 70s, he worked on farms in the Moora district of Western Australia where he started noticing the number of Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos decreasing in the area. Once a familiar sight in the northern agricultural region, history records how 'they blackened the skies' due to their large populations. Sadly, their numbers have dramatically declined and now the bird species is endangered.

Historically, the Moora area is important for Carnaby's due to the abundance of large Salmon gums and Wandoo which provide nesting hollows. Unfortunately, their demise has been swift due to the fragmentation of habitat caused by large-scale clearing, creating a lack of suitable breeding trees and forage plants. Other factors such as fire, climate change, hollow competition and lack of seedling recruitment has exacerbated this situation.

Concerned with the Carnaby's decline around Moora, Wally began developing a design for an artificial breeding log constructed from fallen Salmon gums and Wandoo, in the hope of reviving the population in the area. Over the years the design has been improved and modified, with each log lovingly created and taking many hours to finish. The logs have been a huge success, increasing the population of Carnaby's in Moora from a dozen pairs in the 1980s to a healthy flock today of 92 breeding pairs! In 2010, the Kerkhof Carnaby Group (KCG) formed to help Wally carry out his important work in Moora and further afield. The Moore Catchment Council (MCC) has been supporting Wally and the KCG since 2012, assisting with funding to help build nesting logs, promoting their work, running community awareness events and documenting Wally's knowledge of Carnaby's and log making.



Wally Kerkhof demonstrates preparing a log for the burn in Moora. Photo: Rachel Walmsley.

The increase in the Carnaby's population around Moora is the result of one man's vision against many odds. Wally is a true Landcare legend. There will only ever be one Wally and we honour his efforts! To download *Wally's Nesting Log Construction Guide* visit www.moorecatchment.org.au/news-and-resources/publications/

Wally will be holding a nest log building and erecting workshop on August 30th 9:30am onwards at his place in Moora, in conjunction with Moore Catchment Council. His last workshop in 2017 was very well attended. For more information, please contact Rachel at Moore Catchment Council.

Email: mcc.nrmo@bigpond.com

Rachel Walmsley, Moore Catchment Council

Important Tree Register

Do you know of trees regularly used by black-cockatoos in your neighbourhood? These may be trees that you have observed birds feeding from, or trees that birds fly into just going on dark to rest (referred to as 'night roosts'), or trees that have a hollow which you have observed birds entering or leaving.

If you have observed any of these behaviours, we would love to hear from you because as part of a small grant provided by LotteryWest and The State NRM Office we are collating all this information so that it is available to be used on a council by council basis to protect habitat and inform land management decisions.



Tuart tree, Manning Park. A Peck.

We are in the process of developing a mobile app via which you can submit this information, but in the meantime feel free to record your Important Tree here:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/birdlifetreeregister>

Rebecca Boyland

THE Cocky Conservation Team

Adam Peck, Southwest Black-Cockatoo Project Coordinator

Adam works on all things Black-Cockatoo related - from running the Great Cocky Count, to coordinating Black-Cockatoo breeding surveys and raising awareness to ensure the voices of our cockies are heard. If you would like to volunteer to help these projects or if you know where Black-Cockatoos nest or roost for the night please contact: adam.peck@birdlife.org.au or (08) 9287 2251.

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. She will also be taking on the CockyWatch project. Contact Vicki for questions about the program at: vicki.stokes@birdlife.org.au or (08) 9287 2204.

Rebecca Boyland, Forest Black-Cockatoo Project Coordinator

Rebecca finished up with BirdLife at the end of July. She's really enjoyed her time with the BirdLife flock and especially talking to people about Baudin's and Forest Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos. Rebecca will be heading over to Italy for a couple of months, however we're sure we'll see her back in the Conservation sphere before long. Adam will be adding Baudin's and Red-tails to his current work on Carnaby's.



Forest Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo. Keith Lightbody

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natural resource
management program



Department of Biodiversity,
Conservation and Attractions



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

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