

Cocky Notes

Issue 33: August 2021

COCKATUBES FOR FIRE-AFFECTED CARNABY'S BLACK-COCKATOOS

Adam Peck
Black-Cockatoo Project Officer (Casual)

In February a devastating fire tore through the Wooroloo/Gidgegannup area, burning approximately 11,000 hectares. Fires like these are known to cause losses of nesting hollows, with Ron Johnstone estimating that some intense fires may cause the loss of half the suitable Black-Cockatoo nesting hollows. The large trees and limbs containing hollows needed for Black-Cockatoos may be at more risk than smaller ones, because they are already decaying and senescing. As I followed the news of the fire, I knew some roost sites and nest sites were in the footprint of the fire. I thought of the landowners and fauna at peril and wondered how BirdLife could help.



Some of the devastation left in the wake of the Wooroloo bushfire.

Photo: Adam Peck

I thought back to an offer Francis Smit of Landcare SJ had made to me the year before. He said he had 8 old 'Cockatubes' in the shed which they didn't need and did I want them. So a plan started to form in my head, to install some tubes to replace the lost hollows. I put a post on the Perth Hills Facebook page asking for expressions of interest from people who owned properties affected by the fire. I was flooded with replies! I even managed to track down the owner of a property which was in our Carnaby's

breeding database but had changed hands (letters still work!). I refined this list and selected the nine most appropriate sites. Then Francis told me that an anonymous donor had contributed the funds for 10 more tubes, so we had a total of 18. This meant that most properties received 2 tubes.



Some of the installation team and landowners with a newly installed Cockatube.

Photo: Adam Peck

On July 26 and 27 we did the installations. The weather was blustery but not too bad. We had a young gun arborist by the name of Jordon to install the tubes with a cherry picker and myself and Francis to help out (assisted by Sam Rycken on day two). It was great to meet the landowners and talk to them about the fire and see how the land was recovering. We heard stories of Zamia Palm shoots appearing only a few days after the fire, but we also saw many dead and fallen trees. One person told us how the Wandoo trees (which Noongar people sometimes refer to as 'water trees', due to the fact they store so much water in their trunks) exploded days and even weeks after the fire as the water heated up so much. In fact, when Jordon drilled a hole in a Wandoo trunk to attach a bolt for a tube, we watched in amazement as water poured from the hole for about 30 seconds!

It was not only nature's resilience that I saw on those days, but that of the people who lived in the area. Homes were lost at some of the properties we visited and I was struck by the owner's love of the place and their

determination to rebuild, despite having to wait two years or more to realise that dream. Living in a shed or caravan for that long is not easy, so I really admire their resilience. I hope that these hollows will be taken up by our threatened Black-Cockatoos. We will return in spring with Cocky Cam to see the results.



A newly installed Cockatube in the Wooroloo bushfire scar.
Photo: Adam Peck

Thank you to all the landowners involved and to Landcare SJ and their generous donor for their help.

2021 GREAT COCKY COUNT

Merryn Pryor
Black-Cockatoo Project Coordinator

Thank you to everyone who took part in the 2021 Great Cocky Count on the 28th March this year. It was great to resume the count again this year after it was cancelled in 2020 due to Covid-19. Prior to 2020, the GCC had run consecutively for ten years from 2010 to 2019. As one of the largest citizen science field surveys in WA, the GCC would not be possible without the many dedicated and passionate volunteers who give their time to help count and monitor these charismatic birds. With over 750 people registering this year, we were able to count at 462 black-cockatoo roost sites across the south-west from Chapman Valley to east of Esperance.

A total of 17,773 White-tailed Black-Cockatoos (WTs) were counted across 142 roost sites, with 10,307 counted in the Greater Perth-Peel Region and 7,466 in regional areas. A total of 6,692 Forest Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos (FRTs) were counted across 161 roosts, with 5,771 counted in the Greater Perth-Peel Region and 921 counted within regional areas. 255 of the 462 surveyed roost sites were occupied on the Count night, with 48 of the 255 occupied roost sites recording both WT and FRTs, 94 recording only WT and the remaining 113 roosts with FRTs only. The maximum size of roosting flocks was 1,982 and 689 for WT and FRTs respectively.

35 new White-tailed Black-Cockatoo roost sites and 48 new Forest Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo roost sites were either discovered or confirmed during this year's count.



The GCC survey team at Beale Park, Spearwood.
Photo: Adam Peck

Population trend analysis is ongoing and more details will be made available when the official Great Cocky Count 2021 report is released later in the year. The count contributes essential data to estimate and track population trends for our threatened cockies and to help identify and protect critical habitat. The next few years of the Great Cocky Count will be critical for monitoring the movements and population dynamics of Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo as the remainder of the Gngarara Pine Plantations are harvested and cleared. Over the last five years 62% to 73% of all Carnaby's counted on the Swan Coastal Plain during the Great Cocky Counts have been counted within these pine plantations.



Settling in for the Great Cocky Count.
Photo: Anne Wilson

Thank-you to all our wonderful volunteers who continue to help us monitor the endangered black-cockatoos of WA's southwest and contribute valuable data for their conservation.

BIRD WATERERS: PROVIDING CLEAN FRESH WATER FOR OUR BIRDLIFE

Stephen Szydlowski
Town of Victoria Park

Over the last three years the birdlife at Jirdarup Bushland, Rayment Park, and Harold Rossiter Park in Victoria Park have been enjoying a drink from an innovative [bird waterer](#). The original concept was designed by Gregor Wilson, and the structures were developed by me and our Natural Areas Team at the Town of Victoria Park. Our team's objective from the beginning has been to create a permanent, safe, clean, low maintenance and low-cost water source for the many bird species that visit urban bushlands and tree-lined streetscapes. Somewhat surprisingly, these structures have been remarkably successful urban habitat enhancements. On any sunny day, visitors do not have to wait long to see Singing Honeyeaters, Red Wattlebirds, Willie Wagtails, Australian Ravens, Forest Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos and Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos drinking from these curious rustic metal additions to their fragmented habitats.

The prototype design has two water troughs located 3m above the ground on a pole bolted to a secure reinforced concrete foundation. These troughs are then refilled via a pipe through the pole controlled by an irrigation valve to provide fresh water twice a day from any mains water supply. Each of the troughs has a reinforcing bar perch on one side and a wooden perch on the other to suit birds of all shapes and sizes. The prototype enabled the team to identify and resolve early flaws in the design. Most importantly, it tested the dimensions of the structural engineering that allowed the water to flush through to deliver clean fresh water.

Despite many visits from smaller bird species to the prototype bird waterer, it was obvious after the first summer's trial that it lacked the size and structure to accommodate the many flocks of Forest Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos that regularly visit Jirdarup Bushland within the Town of Victoria Park. After consulting with ornithologist Ron Johnstone at the Western Australian Museum and a network of the bird-loving community connected to Jirdarup Bushland, the bird waterer team created a new design.

The newly designed bird waterer, unveiled in September 2020, was extended to 4m high with four larger troughs and chunky jarrah perches to

accommodate 12 or more black-cockatoos at any one time. The wooden perches are an important feature of the new design, which provides a natural surface for black-cockatoos to gnaw and sharpen their beaks, and to grasp to maintain their claws. In extending the height of the new bird waterer to 4m, it was necessary to adapt the design to support the extra weight. Ultimately the height was always a compromise between providing a water source for birds and keeping them far enough off the ground for the birdlife not to feel threatened by the people below.



The chunky jarrah perches provide the ideal surface for the grasping claws and gnawing beaks of the Forest Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos at Jirdarup Bushland.

Photo: Georgina Wilson

Bird waterer stations provide a permanent fresh water supply for birdlife across an ecologically fragmented urban landscape. The structures can also provide a guide for rebuilding wildlife corridors throughout an urban setting comprised largely of bitumen, concrete, bricks, and mortar. In effect, these natural area enhancements can be the structural steppingstones to inspire and reconnect urban ecosystems. The Town of Victoria Park, like many local governments, is implementing a long-term [urban forest strategy](#) to raise its local tree species canopy cover and enhance biodiversity of a densely subdivided suburban landscape.

There are now ten bird waterers supporting a range of habitats within the Town of Victoria Park and the [City of South Perth](#) including the remnant banksia woodlands at Kensington Bushland and Goss Reserve, the treescape at Collier Park Golf Course, and on the Canning foreshore at Salter Point Lagoon Reserve. The waterers are proving popular with the birdlife – see a flock of Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos enjoying a drink in this [video](#) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FXX-NDJfBPE>) – or visit one in person and see what birds you can spot!

For more information on the bird waterers contact Stephen Szydlowski from the Town of Victoria Park at sszydlowski@vicpark.wa.gov.au.

ADOPT A COCKY NEST UPDATE

Merryn Pryor
Black-Cockatoo Project Coordinator

BirdLife WA's *Adopt a Cocky Nest* project has been a great success with 39 new artificial nest hollows recently installed across 32 properties in the Bullsbrook, Chittering and Bindoon areas. Our original goal of 24 nests was surpassed in just several weeks, with the flow of generous donations from the public demonstrating how passionate and concerned people are in ensuring a future for Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos. This area is a key breeding location for Carnaby's and by supplementing the remaining natural hollows with artificial hollows, we are hoping to increase the available nesting habitat for the birds and subsequent breeding success. Artificial hollows have previously been demonstrated to be successful when installed in known breeding locations with adequate food and water sources nearby.



Completed artificial nest hollows ready for installation.
Photo: Dean Arthurell

The nest hollows were manufactured and installed by Dean Arthurell from [Carnaby's Crusaders](#), with project partner [Hesperia](#) funding their installation, staff time and future monitoring. The members of the public who donated to purchase the artificial hollows will now receive yearly updates on their adopted hollows for the next three years after BirdLife staff monitor them for breeding activity during the breeding season. As we head into the start of this year's breeding season, we have already received reports from some landowners that Carnaby's have been seen prospecting the new hollows, and have high hopes that some nests will see some action in their first year.

Thank you again to project partners [Hesperia](#) and [Carnaby's Crusaders](#), our generous donors who purchased and adopted the nesting tubes, and the landowners who volunteered their properties to host the artificial nest hollows.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR SPRING FOREST RED-TAILED BLACK-COCKATOO COUNT

Registrations are now open for our October Spring FRTBC Count scheduled to take place on the evening of Sunday 10th October. This count was started several years ago in an effort to more closely monitor the movements of Forest Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos (FRTBCs) during the spring, given their recent influx onto the Swan Coastal Plain (SCP) during the Great Cocky Counts in autumn. We are interested to see if their movements will follow a similar seasonal pattern to Carnaby's. This is the first year we have opened up registrations to the wider public as we look to expand the number of sites included.

To register please go to <https://forms.gle/3sCSuiZZLoQouuK26>

Please note only FRTBC roost sites in the Greater Perth-Peel Region (Harvey to Lancelin and inland to York) will be prioritised and included in this count. If you know of any FRTBC roost sites in this area that are occupied in Spring please let us know at greatcockycount@birdlife.org.au or in the Spring FRTBC Count registration form (link above).

2021 WINTER PLANTING SEASON

Merryn Pryor
Black-Cockatoo Project Coordinator

As part of BirdLife's *Alcoa Black-Cockatoo Community Recovery Project*, we have been working to increase connectivity of foraging habitat for black-cockatoos across the southern Swan Coastal Plain. Over the last three years BirdLife WA has provided and/or planted approximately 25,000 seedlings across private properties and shire land in strategic locations. We have focused mainly on black-cockatoo food species such as Banksias, Hakeas, Sheoaks, Grevilleas, Eucalypts and Marri.



Planting alongside the Murray River in Pinjarra
Photo: Merryn Pryor

This year we planted over 10,000 seedlings during six community planting days in Wagerup, Whitby,

Pinjarra, Coolup and Serpentine. Thank you to all the volunteers, school students and Alcoa staff and apprentices who braved all kinds of weather, including hail, to come and help us put the plants in the ground. It was great to see so many enthusiastic people keen to get their hands dirty after the majority of community planting days were cancelled last year due to Covid-19.

With much of the coastal plain receiving above average rainfall in the month of July, there are high hopes that the seedlings will become well established and that survival rates will be high. It was also great to see some of our plantings from last year in the area looking very healthy and growing vigorously. Thank you to all the private landowners, volunteers, partner environmental organisations and shires who helped facilitate and organise the plantings and community days, as well as the Alcoa Foundation for their support of this project.

BLACK-COCKATOO SYMPOSIUM TUESDAY 7TH DECEMBER

BirdLife WA, with the support of the Alcoa Foundation, is holding a symposium on the black-cockatoo species of southwest WA at the Mandurah Performing Arts Centre on Tuesday the 7th December. The symposium will feature presentations from representatives in the black-cockatoo conservation and research field, as well as from BirdLife WA staff on the breeding, revegetation and citizen science aspects of our black-cockatoo projects. We will advertise more information and registration details on our Facebook pages and in our e-News closer to the time. The symposium will be a free event, open to all to attend. In the meantime please put the date in your diaries - we hope to see you then!

PROTECTING WA BLACK-COCKATOOS PROJECT UPDATE

Sam Rycken
Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo Coordinator

In August 2021, I joined Birdlife Australia to coordinate the *Protecting WA Black-cockatoos* project which started last year and was led by Adam Peck. The project is funded by federal Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment through five NRM regions (NACC, Wheatbelt NRM, PHCC, SWCC and SCNRM). In collaboration with the NRM groups and our many volunteers, the aim is to

- Locate new breeding sites and monitor breeding activity (principally of Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo)
- Engage landowners and the wider community in conservation and monitoring, and

- Implement on ground works at key breeding sites on private land to improve breeding outcomes for the species.

At present we are reporting on last year's monitoring effort and can already say that it was a huge success with ongoing interest from the NRM regions, local landholders and volunteers.

I came to Australia in 2015 to start a PhD at Murdoch University on the movement ecology of the three species of black cockatoo here in Western Australia. For this research, we equipped rehabilitated birds with GPS tags and released them into wild flocks to look at flock movement within the landscape. A part of this research involved following flocks around on their daily routines across several sites within their range. During this time, I developed a deep interest and love for these species which led me to taking on this role at Birdlife. I also believe that projects such as the *Protecting WA Black-cockatoos* project, where there is ongoing monitoring of breeding sites through a network of volunteers, landholders and NRM regions, is invaluable and necessary to keep our knowledge on the state of these species' populations up to date.

This spring we will continue the breeding monitoring and visit several sites in each NRM region. It appears to be an early breeding season thanks to our rainy winter, with reports of successful breeding efforts coming in already. Exciting news as well, from the new site all the way up in Kalbarri, where NACC has reported 6 active hollows, with two confirmed chicks and several eggs! Everything is thus pointing towards it being a very exciting season for the second year of this project!!



Three-week-old nestling at a hollow in Kalbarri.

Photo: Cocky Cam (NACC)

In addition, apart from monitoring the known breeding sites, we will be actively looking for new sites by surveying several areas for hollows and breeding activity in the Southwest and the Peel Harvey Region. If anybody has information on potential breeding sites for Carnaby's cockatoos, please let us know through email at carnabys@birdlife.org.au or through contacting our WA office directly.

THE COCKY CONSERVATION TEAM

Merryn Pryor, Black-Cockatoo Project Coordinator

Merryn Pryor has moved into the role of Black-Cockatoo Project Coordinator. She will continue to work primarily on our Alcoa Foundation funded work (Great Cocky Count, Cocky Watch and revegetation) and Adopt a Cocky Nest. Contact Merryn on merryn.pryor@birdlife.org.au or 0424 735 770

Sam Rycken, Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo Coordinator

Sam Rycken has joined the team as our Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo coordinator. He is taking over the federally funded Protecting WA Black-Cockatoos project from Adam. The project is focussed on monitoring the breeding of black-cockatoos and implementing on-ground actions to improve breeding outcomes in partnership with regional NRM groups. Contact Sam on sam.rycken@birdlife.org.au or 0497 530 868

Adam Peck, Black-Cockatoo Project Casual

Adam Peck has taken up a position at DBCA in the Aboriginal Ranger Program. However, he still finds the time to work one day a week at BirdLife as a casual on our black-cockatoo projects. Contact Adam on adam.peck@birdlife.org.au or (08) 9287 2251.

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Australian Government



natural resource management program



HESPERIA

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Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions



The Black-Cockatoo Team checking out our Cocky Cam gear in anticipation of the upcoming breeding season. Photo: Tegan Douglas

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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