

Cocky Notes

Issue 35: August 2022

2022 SPRING FRTBC COUNT

Registrations are now open for our October Alcoa Foundation Spring Cocky Count, scheduled to take place on the evening of **Sunday 9th October**. The Spring Count started in 2018 to more closely monitor the movements of Forest Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos (FRTBCs) in the Greater Perth-Peel area during the spring, given the recent high numbers recorded on the Swan Coastal Plain (SCP) during the Great Cocky Counts in autumn. We are interested to see if their movements will continue to follow a similar seasonal pattern to those of Carnaby's. This year we are particularly interested as we recorded much lower numbers of FRTBCs during the GCC this year, less than a third of last year's (2021) total. We believe this is partly due to the fact that the FRTBCs seem to be having a very good breeding season this year, which may influence their movements on the SCP. Hence we are eager to see what we record during the spring count this year!

Click [here](https://forms.gle/NVBMuyjF3nKwEnx8) to register today, or go to <https://forms.gle/NVBMuyjF3nKwEnx8>.

Registrations close on **Sunday 25th September**.



Forest Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos
Photo: Keith Lightbody

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.

5 YEARS WORKING WITH COCKIES

Adam Peck
Former Carnaby's BC Project Coordinator

Between 2016 and 2021 I was BirdLife's Black-Cockatoo Project Coordinator. Over that time I learned a thing or two, which I'd like to pass on here. Firstly, I'll summarise my time and give some highs and lows. 2016 was a baptism of fire, starting 9 weeks before the Great Cocky Count (GCC). In that time I had to 'learn the ropes', recruit 700 volunteers, book and present 10 workshops and allocate 400 roost sites! In amongst it all, a leaked report led to me being interviewed by ABC and appearing on the nightly news. Two high points happened in 2016. A GCC volunteer named John Clark told me he was tracking a big mob of Carnaby's near Yanchep and the day after the GCC he appeared at the office proudly holding his survey form with a very big number on it. A three person team had counted 4,897 Carnaby's, blowing the GCC record out of the water! What an achievement, which I was proud to play a small part in. I also had the opportunity to visit Coomallo, an important Carnaby's breeding site near Badgingarra. I held a Carnaby's nestling in my hands, a beautiful experience which I have repeated only once since. It started my love affair with Wheatbelt breeding surveys, which I hope to return to once I retire. In 2020 I had the opportunity to visit a site near Kalbarri to search for Carnaby's nests. To give some context, breeding had not been recorded in the area since the 1980's and it is roughly 300km north of the nearest known, current breeding site. After several fruitless days of hard work in rugged conditions, I located a single nest near the banks of the Murchison River. I'm very proud of this survey since it confirmed breeding and has led to more surveys and research opportunities in the area. It's nice to know Carnaby's are thriving on the edge of their range.



Adam with a Carnaby's chick.
Photo provided by Adam Peck.

It wasn't all plain sailing though. The cancellation of the 2020 GCC five days before the event was a blow for me, after working so hard and getting so close. However, it doesn't come close to the disappointment I have over the lack of action on clearing of pine plantations north of Perth. My job had many elements to it, but ultimately I saw the goal to be slowing or reversing the decline of our threatened Black-Cockatoos. The 'Gnangara' issue was always the biggest test: could we get the state government to protect this critical habitat or at the very least revegetate that vast area with native seedlings? RevegGnangara was a crowdfunding campaign to plant native trees in the area, but its aim was to lead the way and kick start a large scale, government funded revegetation project. To date the WA state government have taken no action on this issue, which they should be ashamed of. My hope now is that Tania Plibersek will enforce the EPBC Act and make the McGowan government fulfil its obligations to protect this critical roosting and feeding habitat.

On a brighter note, there are solutions to these big issues. On an individual level, there is a lot YOU can do to help our cockies. Get involved with citizen science, tree planting initiatives and campaigns like Save Our Cockatoos. Install a birdbath in your garden and plant a Macadamia tree. Why Macadamia and not

Banksia I hear you say. It's all about bang for your buck, the calorific value of a Macadamia far outstrips any of our endemic trees and Carnaby's love them. They also happen to be one of the few species which can crack the nut, meaning that feral species do not benefit from them. Wouldn't it be nice to see a 'Million Macas' in Perth?!

I'd like to finish off by saying thanks to: the amazing volunteers who worked on the GCC and breeding surveys with me (I couldn't have done it without you 😊!); the BirdLife matriarchy (Helen, Tegan, Vicki and Sue); all the amazing photographers who contributed photos to me (special mention to Keith) and to Merryn and Sam for taking the baton and keeping BirdLife's WA cocky work going. I am now working as Project Manager of the 'Rehabilitating Roe 8' project and enjoying the challenge. I like to think of it as a radical road deconstruction project, where instead of clearing bush to make way for a road we are clearing a road to make way for bushland! Could this be the way of the future or am I dreaming?

BLACK SPOTS FOR BLACK-COCKATOOS

Tegan Douglas
WA Woodland Bird Program Manager

Our beloved black-cockatoos are known to be clumsy when down on the ground. Every year injuries from vehicle strike make up the majority of injuries vets and wildlife rehabilitators see in the black-cockatoos that come into care. This knowledge has helped us change the advice we provide around black-cockatoo habitat – we advise councils and other land managers not to plant vegetation or take other actions that will lure birds down to those dangerous roadsides.

Earlier this year the perfect storm for black-cockatoos occurred. On the back of bumper wheat and canola harvests, large volumes of grain was being transported on our south coast roads, towards the Albany port. Black-cockatoos quickly found grain that was being spilled from these trucks, and starting feeding heavily on our roadsides, with disastrous consequences. Disturbing reports from both community and colleagues at South Coast Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions tallied 126 dead black-cockatoos in May just around Wellstead area alone. Combined with other reports in nearby areas, there is an estimate of at least 200 black-cockatoos known to have been killed in the space of a couple of months in a relatively small area. Necropsy results from some of these birds revealed many had crops full of canola.

When we consider that these reported numbers are likely an underestimate, the scale of this problem could be massive. Soberingly, even if these black spots aren't happening elsewhere, in these numbers

it means that all the good that is being done across the distribution of black-cockatoos – planting foraging habitat, installing nestboxes – is being outweighed by the sheer destructive impact of this one ‘threatening process’.



Carnaby's feeding on spilt canola near Wellstead.
Photo: Basil Schur

But, there is some good news. In light of this grim and alarming discovery, the community bounced into gear with an amazing result. Local residents wrote letters and started documenting when and where they were seeing birds, getting the issue into the media. At the same time, DBCA, BirdLife, City of Albany, Main Roads WA and CBH got together to determine how this problem could be solved. Main Roads committed to increased vigilance during road checks and quick response to cleaning up reported hazards. CBH conducted an immediate audit of tailgate seals on all their trucks, ensuring all contractors are on the lookout for potential spill sites, and are ready to identify any vehicle damage as soon as it happens, and have spare tailgate seals onboard for immediate repairs. DBCA and City of Albany are working with Main Roads to determine how together they can ensure these black spots are better signposted, so motorists can do their bit to slow down for black-cockatoos too. In the longer term, Main Roads are using this information to determine whether road maintenance activities and road construction guidelines can help keep our black-cockatoos safe.

Thankfully, reports of these deaths have eased for now. But we look to be heading towards another bumper harvest so the volume of grain haulage on our roads doesn't look to be slowing down anytime soon. We ask that our community continue to keep an eye out for our black-cockatoos, in particular as we head into peak Carnaby's breeding season, and adult male birds will be out looking for food to take back to their partners and chicks. Please stay safe on our roads, report grain spills to Main Roads when you see them and report any black spots for black-cockatoos and other seed-eating birds directly to BirdLife, or to the South Coast DBCA office.

BLACK-COCKATOO BREEDING UPDATE

Sam Rycken
Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo Project Coordinator

Welcome everybody to this year's breeding season for Carnaby's Black-cockatoos! Here at BirdLife we are gearing up for what will be another busy breeding season and we hope to see some of our volunteers at the breeding sites. We have already received five confirmed breeding attempts at Kalbarri and one at Lake Clifton. Although we knew from last year that the Carnaby's at Murchison House station make an early start, it does seem that birds at this latitude have already started as well.

As always, if you witness female Carnaby's at hollows or know of any breeding locations, please get in touch with us so we can add it to our database and monitor these areas. If you want to monitor yourself at certain locations, get in touch with us as well.

As of 2022, anybody who monitors a natural or artificial hollow will need to be compliant with the Animal Welfare Act to justify how and why they are disturbing breeding birds. BirdLife have obtained these ethics approvals to conduct our monitoring work, in accordance with an agreed protocol. Volunteers wishing to undertake surveys on our behalf are now required to comply with this also. For more information regarding this, please get in touch with Sam Rycken: sam.rycken@birdlife.org.au.

OPERATION CARNABABY: PASSION TO PURPOSE

Eva Czulowski
Shenton College Student

I wanted to make change with my own hands.

Looking back on last year brings memories of struggle, resilience and pride in Operation Carnababy - an 18-month student-run effort to save the Carnaby's Cockatoo. It taught me how to find and collaborate with a dedicated team, how to ignore the setbacks and continue forwards and most importantly, that so many people do care, but most simply don't know how to help.

I had a passion for pursuing environmental projects and at the time, I was particularly interested in Australian native birds, which gave me the idea of building nesting boxes. It would be a fun, simple and quick project, right?

Very, very wrong.

The black cockatoos were particularly fascinating to

me. I'd hear their distinctive call as they flew over my house. I'd seen their beautiful tiger-patterned red tail feathers and adored their cheeky nature. So, I started researching and realised that they were in for a seriously tough ride.



Eva Czislowski with some curious black-cockatoos
Photo provided by Eva Czislowski

What I noticed was the amount of hardships they faced every day that I never would've even thought about.

An intelligent and passionate Landcare officer once told me to, "imagine the year 1770, when Captain James Cook first stepped onto Australian land. Visualise him walking past a tiny seedling, all of the days and years and centuries that brought us to present day is how long that tree would have taken to mature and form a hollow suitable for black cockatoos to breed in."

No wonder the Carnaby's (white-tailed) Black-cockatoo is endangered (under the IUCN Red List)! If your home takes that long to be built and around 87% of your main habitat (Wheatbelt) has been cleared since 1950, where can you stay? Where can you breed?

Our honeybees (European bees) infest these scarce hollows and sting their chicks to death. The invasive rainbow lorikeets also steal these hollows from them and crows which we encourage through our rubbish and bins pluck their tail feathers so they can't fly. It doesn't end there. Farmers illegally shoot them when they feed off their orchards, poachers smuggle them across borders, hot days kill their vulnerable chicks, the list goes on...

One of the most interesting surveys I'd heard about was the Coomallo Creek experiment where artificial hollows had been installed. What was discovered, was that not only did the presence of these tubes allow

black cockatoos to breed more, (up to 112% increase in breeding rate), sometimes even preferring them to natural hollows, they bred at an age of up to two years younger.

They really were a success story, and their design had been improved over many years, however the DBCA regulations to making them were strict, so to be involved meant to give it everything. To get the job done, the hollows had to be built to endure 70 years (2 full life cycles of the Carnaby's).

After meeting with experts, wildlife gurus, researching and planning out my approach to build 20, I introduced the plan to my school, Shenton College. As usual, my principal Mr Morgan was supportive and trusting and before I knew it, a whole crowd of Shenton staff and students had jumped on board to support me. Mr Penno, a design and technology teacher who I'd never met before decided to dedicate months to our project, providing expertise in the technicalities of our hollow designs. Teachers and students helped to coordinate the funding, ordering and execution, but the largest support came from my friends.

Nothing would have been achieved to the extent that it was achieved without Chris, Lucas, Phoebe and Hannah- the 'regulars'. We worked hard lunch time after lunch time and when I was feeling down and like we weren't getting anywhere, they were the ones who kept me going. It was a challenge, especially trying to balance my sport, triathlon, schoolwork, assessments, a social life as well as the project.

But we stuck at it and soon enough the 24th of June, 2021 came around when we launched our 'big event' day and around 60 students, teachers and parents arrived to help us build the remainder of the 40 artificial hollows, as we doubled the goal upon Mr Morgan's recommendation.

I remember walking up to the Techspace building and being overwhelmed with joy at the sea of people that had crowded outside. The ABC radio was there, as well as Dean Arthurell, a cockatoo guru and his two VIP black cockatoo guests.



Constructing the artificial hollows
Photo provided by Eva Czislowski

Since then, our hollows have been installed within breeding range, outside of metropolitan Perth and we have had around 6 eggs including our first successfully fledged chick 'Carnie' who we banded with Dean. The project received an astonishing amount of media attention - hundreds of views on social media, two radio interviews with Russel Woolf, incorporation into a mini ABC documentary and in newspapers. I even received the Australian Defence Force Long Tan Youth Leadership Award (2021) as well as the Young Community Citizen of The Year for the Town of Cottesloe (2022). However, it was certainly a team effort with many people chipping in to do their part.



A chick in one of the newly constructed artificial hollows.
Photo provided by Eva Czislawski

Now we can just hope that each breeding season brings more chicks and, in the meantime, we can work towards conserving and restoring their habitat - woodlands, bushland and the Gngangara pine plantation. Anyone can make an impact at any time for our endemic feathered friends.

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Friends of Shenton Bushland
Carnaby Crusader's
Acu-Tech Piping Systems



2022 GREAT COCKY COUNT UPDATE

Merryn Pryor
WA Black-Cockatoo Project Coordinator

Thank you to everyone who took part in the 2022 Great Cocky Count on the 3rd April earlier this year. This year marked the twelfth Great Cocky Count since it became part of the annual calendar in 2010. Southwest black-cockatoos occur over a large area

and a range of tenures, thus 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. Over 600 volunteers registered this year and 362 black-cockatoo roost sites across the south-west from Chapman Valley to east of Esperance were counted on GCC night.

A total of 21,277 White-tailed Black-Cockatoos (WTs) were counted across 115 roost sites, with 12,706 counted in the Greater Perth-Peel Region and 8,571 in regional areas. A total of 2,066 Forest Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos (FRTs) were counted across 109 roosts, with 1,488 counted in the Greater Perth-Peel Region and 578 counted within regional areas. 199 of the 362 roost sites were occupied giving an overall occupancy rate of 55%. 25 of the 199 occupied roost sites recorded both WT's and FRT's, 90 recorded only WT's and the remaining 84 roosts recorded FRT's only. The highest single white-tailed black-cockatoo roost count was 5,032, recorded in the Gngangara pine plantations, while the highest roost count for FRT's was 130 birds in Teesdale. Four new white-tailed black-cockatoo roost sites, nine new Forest Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo roost sites and one new joint roost site were either discovered or confirmed during this year's count.

Population trend analysis is ongoing and more details will be made available when the final report is released later in the year. A preliminary look at the data indicates that the count of FRT's was much lower than the previous few years, with lower than usual counts at almost all major roost sites across the Greater Perth Metropolitan area. On the other hand, it seems that the FRT's are having a bumper breeding season this year, so it is possible the low number is because pairs may have already been prospecting for suitable hollows for breeding in forested areas. It will be interesting to see what their numbers are like during the Alcoa Foundation Spring Cocky Count. The total white-tailed black-cockatoo count was back up above 20,000 individuals after a dip in numbers last year, however the count in the northern Darling Scarp and Plateau Region was the lowest it has been since 2015. The count continues to contribute essential data to estimate and track population trends for black-cockatoos and to help identify and protect critical habitat. With the remainder of the Gngangara pine plantations set to be cleared within the next couple of years and other important remnant habitat continuing to be cleared, it is more important than ever to continue to monitor the populations of threatened southwest black-cockatoos.

Thank-you once again 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.

The GCC is supported by the Alcoa Foundation.

THE COCKY CONSERVATION TEAM

Merryn Pryor, Black-Cockatoo Project Coordinator

Merryn Pryor continues to work primarily on our Alcoa Foundation funded work (Great Cocky Count, Cocky Watch, Spring Count and revegetation) and Adopt/Revamp a Cocky Nest project. Contact Merryn on merryn.pryor@birdlife.org.au or 0424 735 770.

Sam Rycken, Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo Coordinator

Sam Rycken works on the federally funded Protecting WA Black-Cockatoos project. 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.

Tegan Douglas, WA Woodland Bird Program Manager

Tegan Douglas has taken over the management of BirdLife's Western Australian black-cockatoo projects and is also in charge of the new Birds on Farms project that has started up again this year. Contact Tegan on tegan.douglas@birdlife.org.au.



Introducing the endangered *Calyptorhynchus latirostris bookweekus!* A parent sent a photo in of their child dressed up as a Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo for their school's Book Week Dress-Up Day. We loved it so much that we had to share it with you. Our younger generations love wildlife, including endangered black-cockatoos. We must work to conserve and protect these precious species to ensure that they are still around to be enjoyed by future generations for many more years to come.

Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo Dress-up
Photo: Kendal Becu

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