

# Cocky Notes

Issue 36: March 2023

## REGISTER FOR THE 2023 GREAT COCKY COUNT TODAY!

Registrations for the 2023 Great Cocky Count (GCC) are closing soon! This year the Count will be held on Sunday, April 2, at sunset. We need your help to make it bigger & better than last year. Register online by March 12 by scanning the QR code below or going to:

<https://birdlife.org.au/events/great-cocky-count/>

If you know of any areas where black-cockatoos roost overnight, please let us know at [greatcockycount@birdlife.org.au](mailto:greatcockycount@birdlife.org.au) so that we can include it in this year's count.

To find out more about the GCC go to: <https://birdlife.org.au/events/great-cocky-count/>



## CARNABY'S BLACK-COCKATOO BREEDING PROGRAM: USING THE PAST TO HELP THE FUTURE

Sam Rycken  
WA Carnaby's Black Cockatoo Coordinator

The conclusion of the most recent breeding season signals the end of the current funding arrangement for the Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo Breeding Program. It by no means signals the end of our work, as keeping an eagle eye on how our breeding black-cockatoos are faring remains central to what we need

birds are in our nature

to do to help this species. To date this program has been able to consistently evaluate the breeding attempts for Carnaby's Black-cockatoos across their distribution every year. Concerted efforts by community, volunteers and staff allow us to do this as well as expand our knowledge, adding new sites each year too.



Baudin's Black-Cockatoo breeding in a suburban area in Cowaramup, WA.

Photo: Sam Rycken

But, with now over 10 years of data it is time to critically evaluate this knowledge to uncover any underlying trends within the Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo breeding population. We are therefore working on a comprehensive report this year, which will investigate the data collected over time throughout the whole project. This is important because the knowledge gathered here is shared with relevant stakeholders to provide up-to-date information on key breeding sites for the species and ensure their protection. And through collaboration with Black-Cockatoo experts, Natural Resource Management groups and community the project has seen important on ground conservation actions delivered each year, and we need to make sure we are able to provide the best advice based upon what the birds are doing.

We will be ensuring that breeding monitoring is going ahead for the foreseeable future with the aim to continue to monitor existing sites and discover new ones. For this, we will continue to work with NRM groups in the Southwest and any volunteer groups,

community and Aboriginal corporations. Investigation for 'new' sites will be mostly targeted to the edges of the Carnaby's Black Cockatoo range, such as Dragon Rocks Nature Reserve and Three Springs; which are important as they have seen extensive clearing and are good candidates for revegetation actions and/or installation of artificial hollows. Further investigation is also required in the forested parts of the Southwest, for which we still lack data, as the Jarrah Forest can be challenging to survey. With areas like Cowaramup and Witchcliffe (near Margaret River) being recognised as tourist hot spots, we are seeing development of these areas which are encroaching on the breeding and foraging habitat of all three species of black-cockatoo. It is therefore important to continue gathering breeding information for all sites and ensure ongoing protection of breeding habitat.



Two hollows, two poles. The perfect team effort with the Badgebup rangers!  
Photo provided by Sam Rycken

Through my role for Birdlife, I have learned that there is a lot of love for black-cockatoos in our community and that most people want to see them protected. It is inspiring to team up with the different organisations involved with this project, who are all working towards better conservation outcomes for these species. As this chapter of the breeding program concludes, all of us are working hard to see it continued far into the future. At BirdLife, we would like to thank you all for your efforts so far and hope to collaborate in the time to come!

## KAARAKIN BLACK COCKATOO RESCUE SUMMARY 2022

Sam Clarke

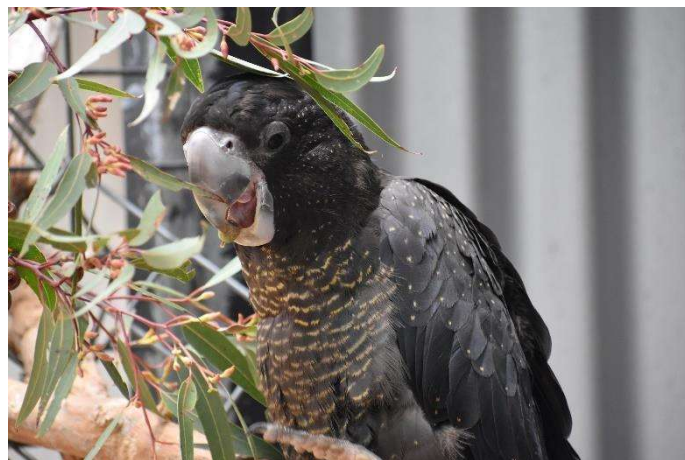
Kaarakin Black Cockatoo Conservation Centre

Kaarakin Black Cockatoo Rescue Summary 2022  
Kaarakin is a not-for-profit centre located in the Perth Hills on a large 41 acre bushland site. We are almost entirely volunteer run with just three part time staff and over 150 volunteers. We specialise in the rescue, rehabilitation and release of the three endemic and endangered black cockatoos that inhabit the southwest of Western Australia.

Similar to 2021, 2022 was another very busy year of us in terms of rescues. We rescued black cockatoos in need of our help throughout their range, including rescuing cockatoos from places such as Augusta, Jurien Bay and York to name a few. With the record high fuel prices, this put a large strain on the centre as we once again traveled over 30,000km in order to rescue black cockatoos in need of our help.

During 2022 we responded to over 209 black cockatoo rescues, travelled over 30,400km and spent over 404hrs on the road! Of the three species, Forest red-tails made up the majority of the rescues (58%), with Carnabys being the second highest (36%) and Baudin's the minority (6%). This was a similar trend as seen in 2021 (60% Forest red tails, 35% Carnaby's, 5% Baudins). We successfully released 63 black cockatoos back into the wild for their second shot at freedom! We still currently have over 200 black cockatoos in our care.

While the total number of rescues may have been down from 2021 (278, a record year) the total number of juveniles (fledglings/nestlings) needing rescuing increased nearly 400%! This is likely due to a bumper breeding season for Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos.



A juvenile Forest Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo beginning the long learning journey of eating native foods.  
Photo: Sam Clarke

Juveniles require a significant amount of time and investment. They need to be carefully hand reared in a manner that does not lead to imprinting, need to



learn to socialise and how to eat native foods. This thorough process and program will take most juveniles around two years to complete, so having so many juveniles takes up a lot of space, time and resources. We had such a large influx of juveniles this year that our clinic became full and we had to scramble to set up new spaces in buildings around site to accommodate them. Some days we were receiving up to 3 rescue calls for juvenile red tails a day and one weekend we rescued a record breaking 9 threatened black cockatoos alone! This 2022 breeding season was the busiest and most stretched the centre had ever been since it began back in 2008.

The top two reasons for admission remained the same as previous years. Motor Vehicle Accidents (MVA's) made up ~40% of rescues and raven attacks ~15%. Other reasons for admissions included illegal shooting, animal attacks, severe weather events, displaced juveniles, Cockatoo Hindlimb Paralysis Syndrome (CHiPS) and accidentally trapping.

While MVA's remain the most common injury for all three species, the second cause of injury changes between each species. This highlights their own individual threats and the need to address these threats for each individual species in order for successful conservation outcomes.



Car strike or MVA's remain the most common reason for admission at Kaarakin.  
Photo: Keith Lightbody

The second biggest injury for Forest red-tails was raven attacks, which made up at least 25% of reasons for admission, particularly in juvenile birds, compared to just 2.5% of Carnaby's and 0% of Baudin's admissions. The second biggest reason or admissions for Carnaby's was CHiPS (around 7%), which was not recorded at all in the other two species. The second biggest injury seen in Baudin's was illegal shooting which made up 20% of their admissions and was not recorded in the other two species. Illegal shooting of Baudin's numbers is likely a lot higher as it is seldom reported due to the illegal nature. It is often fatal and usually occurs in secluded areas where the birds are not found and picked up if they do manage to escape with injuries.

In 2023 we are now awaiting the return of large

Carnaby flocks with their juveniles as they come back to their non-breeding grounds. Given the high success of breeding with Forest Red-Tails we are preparing for the possibility of an influx of Carnaby juveniles this season as well. As of the 20<sup>th</sup> Jan we have received our first three juveniles requiring hand rearing and unfortunately expect many more.

## ADOPT A COCKY NEST PROJECT UPDATE

Merryn Pryor  
WA Black-Cockatoo Project Coordinator

Adopt a Cocky Nest started in 2021 to raise money to purchase and install artificial hollows in known breeding locations. BirdLife and other black-cockatoo experts recommend against the installation of artificial hollows on the Swan Coastal Plain, particularly in the Perth metro area, because Carnaby's –

- Haven't historically bred in these locations,
- Face increased risks from car strike, raven attack and human disturbance if they were to breed there, and
- Have rarely made use of artificial hollows that have been installed in these locations in past years – instead the hollows have remained empty or have been inhabited by other species such as Galahs.

This project allowed people who were unable to install hollows in their own neighbourhood the opportunity to support breeding habitat in more appropriate breeding locations. As a result of our fundraising efforts 39 artificial hollows were installed on private properties within the Bullsbrook, Bindoon and Chittering areas, which are well known Carnaby's breeding locations.

Last year was the second breeding season since the hollows had been installed. BirdLife Australia and Carnaby's Crusaders staff monitored the hollows in November. Six hollows recorded Carnaby's breeding in them, three with one or two eggs, one with a chick and two with both an egg and chick. The chicks ranged from 4 days old to 7 weeks old.



A Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo chick in one of the 'Adopt a Cocky Nest' artificial hollows.  
Photo: BirdLife Australia

It was great to see that another artificial hollow has become active and is being used by Carnaby's for breeding for the first time. This is in addition to the same five artificial hollows that had breeding recorded in them last year. Hopefully, over time, the Carnaby's will continue to discover the artificial hollows and make use of them. There are records of artificial hollows being installed for 10 years before they were discovered and used by breeding Carnaby's for the first time.

Many thanks once again to all of our wonderful donors, as well as the private property owners hosting the tubes and allowing us continued access to their land to monitor the nests. A big thankyou also to project partners Hesperia and Carnaby's Crusaders for their ongoing support of the project.

## REVAMP A COCKY NEST PROJECT

Merryn Pryor  
WA Black-Cockatoo Project Coordinator

Following on from the success of our *Adopt a Cocky Nest* project, BirdLife once again partnered with Hesperia to run our Revamp a Cocky Nest project in 2022.



A female Carnaby's looking down from one of the renovated artificial hollows during breeding monitoring in October.  
Photo: Sam Rycken

While there is currently a big focus in the community and conservation industry on installing new artificial nest hollows for black-cockatoos to aid in their breeding efforts, the maintenance and repair of existing artificial hollows is commonly overlooked. Maintenance of existing artificial hollows is critical to ensure they remain viable options for Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos. Over time the woodchip floors in the bottom of the hollows decay and compact. If the level of woodchips gets too low, Carnaby's can chew the base of the hollow, which can cause any eggs or chicks to fall through holes in the base. Low woodchip levels can also create a gap between the hollow floor and the bottom of the ladder. This can make it difficult for the Carnaby's to climb out, as well as any other species that may use the hollow. The sacrificial chewing posts also need replacing every couple of

years as they are chewed up by the Carnaby's as they create their own woodchips to line the nest hollow. Hence, if they fall into disrepair then they not only become unsuitable for nesting, but also become dangerous for black-cockatoos and other animals that may try to use them.

Therefore, we turned our efforts to fundraising for some vital repairs and maintenance to be carried out at an important breeding ground in Newdegate. It was noticed during the previous breeding season that many of the thirty artificial hollows in this location desperately needed some maintenance and repairs for them to remain viable breeding options for Carnaby's. Once again our call for donations was answered and in July 2022 Australian Black-Cockatoo Specialists were engaged to carry out the nest hollow renovations. During the maintenance –

- Up to 60 litres of wood chips were used to top up each of the 30 artificial hollows with a total of 1503 litres used
- New sacrificial posts were replaced in artificial hollows, ladders were refastened and post brackets were relocated where required
- All trees, hollows and fixings were inspected to ensure all hollows were returned to peak condition



Before and after photos of one of the artificial hollows.  
Photo: Rick Dawson

As part of the Revamp a Cocky Nest project a water trough was installed to provide a permanent, fresh water source for the Carnaby's to maximise breeding success. In the past there has been the threat of the dams on the property drying up in particularly dry years. If this were to happen, it is likely that most breeding attempts would fail, as water close to nesting hollows is essential for the male and female to be able to provision themselves during the nesting period.

The water trough was installed a short distance away from the farmhouse and sheds to minimise disturbance. It is in an area that is fenced off from livestock, to minimise disturbance as well as keep the trough and water clean. The trough is connected to water tanks on the property and will remain topped

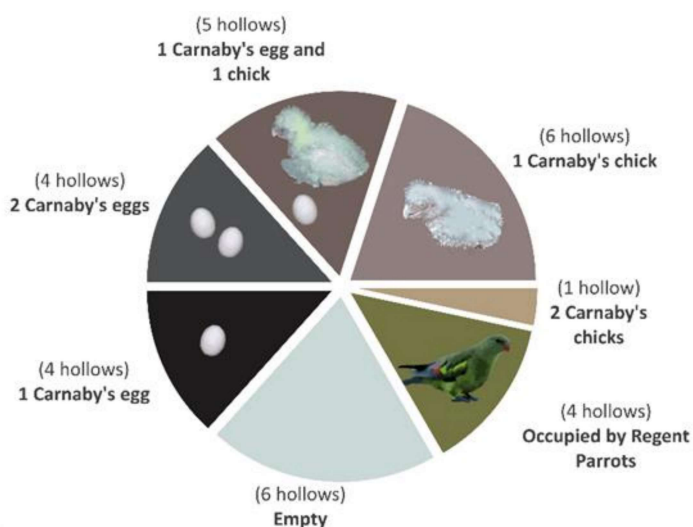


up to ensure the continual supply of water. Since the water trough was installed workers on the farm have observed the Carnaby's congregating around it and drinking from it on multiple occasions.



The installed water trough at the breeding ground.  
Photo provided by Lyn Kennedy

Following the nest hollow repairs Birdlife staff returned in October to monitor the hollows using a CockyCam - a camera attached to a telescopic pole via a flexible arm. The results are as follows -



Pie chart showing the breeding outcomes of the 30 artificial hollows.  
Provided by Aline Gibson Vega

This is a great result, with 20 hollows containing Carnaby's at various stages of breeding. The oldest chick was roughly 3 weeks old. The fact that we encountered several nests with only one egg, indicates the possibility that they had just been laid and the females were yet to lay a second egg. Some of the inactive nests may have become occupied later in the season. Sometimes if a pair is unsuccessful in breeding early in the season then they may try to breed a second time and produce a second clutch, so prospecting and egg-laying into November is common. Next year we are planning two monitoring sessions, one in October and one in December, to monitor fledging success as well as breeding

attempts. As chicks get older the likelihood that they will fledge successfully increases, so monitoring the hollows later in the year will tell us how many chicks have survived and are likely to fledge, as well as detecting any later breeding attempts.

Thank you to all our generous donors, Australian Black Cockatoo Specialists, the Kennedy family and project partner Hesperia, without whom this project wouldn't be possible.

## COCKY COUNTS UPDATE

Merryn Pryor  
Black-Cockatoo Project Coordinator

Preparations are in full swing for the 13<sup>th</sup> annual Great Cocky Count since 2010 due to take place on the evening of Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> April. Registrations are closing soon so get in quick to register by Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> March at <https://birdlife.org.au/events/great-cocky-count/>. If you know of a black-cockatoo night roost near you that is not currently included, or you are unsure whether it is currently included, in the GCC, then we would love to hear from you! Please email [greatcockycount@birdlife.org.au](mailto:greatcockycount@birdlife.org.au) with the details.

We have been holding workshops throughout the southwest in the lead up to the Great Cocky Count, with a record 14 workshops scheduled. It has been wonderful to meet so many people and hear so many stories about people's interactions with black-cockatoos. These information sessions teach the community about the basic biology, identification and ecology of black-cockatoos, and shows people how the power of citizen science can gather valuable data on black-cockatoos and their population trends.

The results from the 2022 Alcoa Foundation Spring Cocky Count, held on the 9th October, have now been collated. 66 sites were surveyed across the Greater Perth Peel Region, one more than last year. Over 350 more Forest Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos were counted than the previous year (1,290 in 2022 compared to 921 in 2021). We were interested in seeing what the numbers of FRTBCs would be like during the Spring count last year, as the count of FRTBCs in the April GCC was the lowest it had been since 2016. However, despite the very low April count, the numbers in Spring continued to rise with the 2022 October count recording the greatest number of birds since it began in 2018. It appears that after a bumper Autumn breeding season last year, the FRTBCs were once again returning to the Greater Perth-Peel region by the October count. Of the 1,290 FRTBCs counted, 69% were recorded on the Northern Darling Scarp and Plateau, while the rest were recorded at sites on the Swan Coastal Plain.

The results from the 2021 and 2022 Great Cocky Counts have been finalised and we are due to release the combined report soon. We thank you for your patience in awaiting the release of the report. We have faced a number of setbacks with software, staff

turnover and covid, however now that the final trend analyses have been completed it shouldn't be too long now. We believe it is important to continue to relay the results to the community and all our participants to both encourage people to continue assisting us with the count, as well as to make sure the community is well aware of what is happening regarding our threatened black-cockatoo populations.

*The GCC is supported by the Alcoa Foundation.*

## THE COCKY CONSERVATION TEAM

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# HESPERIA

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natural resource  
management program



Australian Government



Department of Biodiversity,  
Conservation and Attractions



Keep an eye out for black-cockatoos in the art world. This unusually quiet pair of male Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos were spotted by staff in Bridgetown near where one of our workshops was held. There are lots of murals and artwork around depicting black-cockatoos if you keep an eye open! Photo: Merryn Pryor

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