



No. 19 Butler's corella

Butler's corella

Butler's corella (*Cacatua pastinator butleri*), is one of two subspecies of western long-billed corella (*C. pastinator*) (Figure 2). It is found in the northern and central Wheatbelt of Western Australia. The other geographically isolated subspecies of the western long-billed corella, Muir's corella (*C. p. pastinator*), is found in one small population in the south-west near Lake Muir (Figure 2). Both subspecies are endemic to Western Australia and are declared pests of agriculture in selected areas.

Description

Butler's corella is a medium-sized white cockatoo 40-48 centimetres in length and 600-750 grams in weight. The white feathers of these birds are often stained or dirty because they dig most of their food out of the ground with their long bills.

The undersides of the wings and tail are mostly yellow in colour and the birds have a blue grey ring of bare skin around the eye (Figure 1). The feathers between the eye and beak, and the bases of the feathers on the head and underparts are a rich salmon-pink. This colour can be seen when the bird preens or when its feathers are ruffled by the wind. Males, females and immature birds are all similar in appearance. The birds give a variety of loud, raucous calls.

The little corella (*C. sanguinea*), and Butler's corella both occur in parts of the northern Wheatbelt (Dongara and areas to the east) and it can be difficult to distinguish between them (refer to Fauna note no. 20. little corella. DEC, Western Australia).

Distribution and habitat

Butler's corella favours lightly wooded country including farmland, because these habitats provide good food, water and trees for roosting. A large population existed between Moora and Dongara in the 1920s and has expanded east and south-east, with the provision of food and permanent water, from agricultural development.

At present, the Butler's corella population is thought to number 20,000 to 30,000 individuals and is located between Dongara, Mingenew, Morawa and Three Springs, south to Dandaragan, Cataby, Wongan Hills and Koorda. The population is continuing to spread south-east and Butler's corella has been recorded in the central Wheatbelt at Toodyay, Northam, Yoting, Quairading and Narrogin.

Diet

Butler's corella consumes large quantities of the seeds from wheat (*Triticum aestivum*), oats (*Avena sativa*), barley (*Hordeum vulgare*) and double gees (*Emex australis*). They eat smaller quantities of seeds from other plants, particularly cape weed (*Arctotheca calendula*) and insect larvae. They also consume the corms of guildford grass (*Romulea rosea*).



Figure 1 Butler's corella (*Cacatua pastinator butleri*) (Photo Tony Kirkby, Western Australian Museum).

Breeding

Butler's corella nests in the hollows of large eucalypts including salmon gum (*Eucalyptus salmonophloia*) and wandoo (*E. wandoo*). From August to October one to four eggs (average of 2.7) are laid and the incubation period is 24-29 days. Both parents incubate the eggs and feed the chicks. Young birds spend about 60 days in the nest and the number of young that fledge averages 1.6 birds per nest per year.

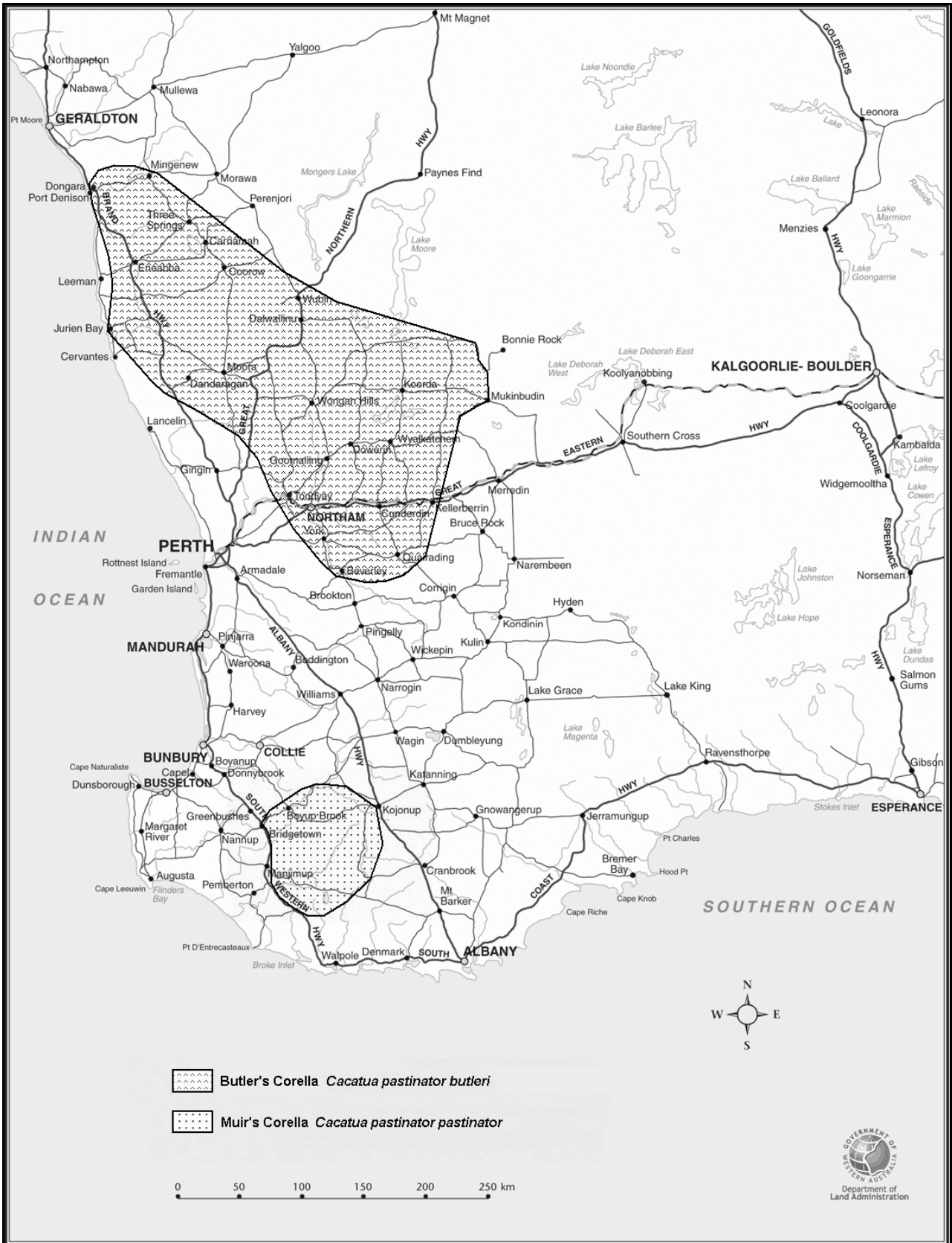


Figure 1 Distribution of Butler's corella (*Cacatua pastinator butleri*) and Muir's corella (*Cacatua pastinator pastinator*) (based on information taken from Johnstone and Storr (1998)).

After fledging, the young birds move with their parents to suitable feeding and roosting areas, where they join other family groups and immature birds. Young birds are dependant on their parents for about six months after leaving the nest but begin to forage for themselves two to three weeks after leaving the nest.

Adults must reach three to five years of age before they can breed and a pair has to breed for 10 years to replace itself. The average life expectancy of adult birds is estimated to be 14 years for females and 17 years for males. One bird banded in the wild was recovered 21 years later. However, young birds have a much lower life expectancy because most die before reaching breeding age.

Hollow availability

At present there are sufficient eucalypts capable of providing hollows for Butler's corella. However, few new trees have grown in the Wheatbelt for over 50 years due to grazing by livestock and rabbits. In addition, many of those that remain are dead or dying. Establishment of new trees is urgently needed in reserves and shelter belts so that future generations of corellas and other cockatoos have hollows in which to breed.

Behaviour

Adults form long-lasting pair bonds and are rarely observed apart. The birds tend to have traditional roosting sites (usually in dense timber) from which they leave to feed in the morning and to which they return at night.

Birds breeding in the north-eastern Wheatbelt move with their offspring to the west in the summer, where large flocks of up to 7,000 individuals form (large flocks have been seen at Dalwallinu, Dongara, Geraldton and Morawa). Birds breeding further south also form summer flocks but these remain near their breeding areas. It may be that the movements of the northern birds is a relic behaviour from the times before settlement when the coastal areas offered water and soft ground for digging during the summer months.

Damage

Butler's corella eats the sprouting shoots of grain crops but this is generally of little economic concern to farmers. In some areas, the corellas can become a nuisance around settlements by defoliating trees. They also dig up the grass on ovals, race tracks and lawns and eat the roots. Around households, the corellas can chew wiring and other fittings and their loud calls can be a nuisance. They sometimes damage grain storage facilities by penetrating tarpaulins or dislodging other fixtures.

Status and damage reduction

Butler's corella is a declared pest of agriculture under the provisions of the *Agriculture and Related Resources Protection Act 1976*, administered by the Western Australian Department of Agriculture and Food. This declaration allows for the approval and implementation of a management program in various areas of the state.

As a native species, Butler's corella is protected under the provisions of the *Wildlife Conservation Act 1950*, administered by the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC). Under this Act, Butler's corella can be shot on private land in accordance with an

open season notice without the need to obtain a damage licence from DEC. The area covered by the notice comprises the municipal districts of Dalwallinu, Irwin, Mingenew, Morawa, Mullewa, Perenjori and Three Springs. In these areas, the corella populations are secure and damage to agriculture by the birds is likely to be an ongoing problem.

Outside the open season area, a damage licence from DEC is required prior to shooting. For more information contact the DEC and refer to Fauna note no. 2. Scaring and repelling birds to reduce damage. DEC, Western Australia.

Destruction should be viewed as a last resort after all other control options have been attempted. For other management options see the notes listed under further reading. A strategy comprising a number of techniques will probably be needed to reduce damage caused by corellas.

Further reading

- Fauna note no. 2. Scaring and repelling birds to reduce damage. DEC, Western Australia.
- Fauna note no. 3. Netting to reduce bird damage. DEC, Western Australia.
- Fauna note no. 4. Muir's corella. DEC, Western Australia.
- Fauna note no. 9. Destruction of birds to reduce damage. DEC, Western Australia.
- Fauna note no. 11. Limiting access to food to reduce bird damage. DEC, Western Australia.
- Fauna note no. 13. Decoy feeding – Providing alternative food to birds to reduce damage. DEC, Western Australia.
- Fauna note no. 15. Options for corella, galah and cockatoo control. DEC, Western Australia.

References

- Johnstone, R.E. and Storr, G.M. (1998) Handbook of Western Australian Birds. Volume 1. Non-passerines. Western Australian Museum, Perth.
- Smith, G.T. and Rowley, I. (1995) Survival of adult and nestling western long-billed corellas, *Cacatua pastinator*, and Major Mitchell cockatoos, *C. leadbeateri*, in the wheatbelt of Western Australia. *Wildl. Res.* 22: 155-162.
- Smith, G.T. and Moore, L.A. (1992) Patterns of movements in the western long-billed corella *Cacatua pastinator* in the south-west of Western Australia. *Emu* 92: 19-27.
- Smith, G.T. (1991) Breeding ecology of the Western Long-billed Corella, *Cacatua pastinator pastinator*. *Wildl. Res.* 18: 91-110.
- Smith, G.T. and Moore, L.A. (1991) Foods of corellas *Cacatua pastinator* in Western Australia. *Emu* 91: 87-92.
- Saunders, D.A., Rowley, I., and Smith, G.T. (1985) The effects of clearing for agriculture on the distribution of cockatoos in the southwest of Western Australia. In 'Birds of Eucalypt Forests and Woodlands: Ecology, Conservation, Management.' (Eds. Keast, A., Ford, H. and Saunders, D.) RAOU and Surrey Beatty and Sons, NSW.

Further information

Contact your local DEC office.

See the department's website for the latest information:

www.dec.wa.gov.au.

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