



No. 20 Little corella

The little corella (*Cacatua sanguinea*), occurs throughout the arid areas of mainland Australia and in New Guinea. In Western Australia it is found in the Kimberley, Pilbara, Gascoyne, Murchison and parts of the northern Wheatbelt. It is a declared pest of agriculture in Western Australia.

Description

The little corella is 37-46 centimetres in length and weighs 390-555 grams. It is a small white cockatoo with a small crest and white plumage that often appears dirty. The undersides of the wings and tail are mostly sulphur yellow in colour and the birds have a blue grey ring of bare skin around the eye. Little corellas give a variety of loud calls.

The feathers in the area between the bill and the eye (see Figure 1) and the bases of the feathers on the crown, cheek patches and throat are a rich salmon pink. This colour is seen when the bird preens or the wind ruffles the feathers. Birds from Kimberley subspecies *C. s. sanguinea* (see Figure 2), have less pink on their face than birds from elsewhere in the State, subspecies *C. s. westralensis* (see Figure 2).

The little corella and Butler's corella (*C. pastinator butleri*), both occur in parts of the northern Wheatbelt (Dongara and further east) and it can be very difficult to distinguish between them (refer to Fauna note No. 19. Butler's corella. DEC, Western Australia) from a distance.



Figure 1 Little corella (*Cacatua sanguinea*) (Photo Rick Dawson/DEC).

Distribution and habitat

The little corella inhabits most types of open country, particularly timbered watercourses, the surrounds of dams and tanks, grasslands and farmlands. In many areas they are locally common around station homesteads and towns. In the north, the birds are found mainly in flat lands near larger watercourses, towns, homesteads and coasts. In the south, the birds commonly occur in farmlands.

The distribution and status of the Kimberley subspecies has remained much the same since settlement. The southern subspecies however, has expanded in range as a result of agricultural development.

Little corellas originally occurred from the Pilbara, south to the Murchison River, where they lived around watercourses and foraged on the riverine plains. The establishment of permanent water for stock in the pastoral areas most likely enabled the population to expand away from natural watercourses. In northern Wheatbelt areas, suitable habitat and the availability of abundant food through grain production enabled them to expand south. They are now locally common in and near towns including Dongara, Mingenew and Three Springs.

Flocks of little corellas are also present in Perth, but these birds largely originate from other parts of Australia, where they escaped or were released from aviaries and subsequently bred in the wild. These birds could pose a threat to the Western Australian subspecies of corella through interbreeding and are the subject of a control program coordinated by the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC).

Diet

Little corellas feed on seasonally available seeds and bulbs. In the Wheatbelt, they commonly eat the seeds of wheat (*Triticum aestivum*), oats (*Avena sativa*) and double gees (*Emex australis*), pie melon (*Citrullus lanatus*), cape weed (*Arctotheca calendula*), barley (*Hordeum vulgare*), native plants and insect larvae. Further north, the corellas commonly feed on the seeds of wheat and oats, burrs (*Sclerolaena* spp.), tickweed (*Cleome viscosa*) and melons.

In the Kimberley, little corellas consume the seeds from a variety of native and introduced plants including oats, sorghum (*Sorghum bicolor*), rice (*Oryza sativa*), spinifex (*Triodia* spp.), wheat and grasses (e.g. *Brachiaria* sp., *Aristida* sp.).



Figure 1 Distribution of the little corella subspecies *C.s. sanguinea* and *C.s. westralensis* in Western Australia (Adapted from Johnstone and Storr (1998)).

Breeding

In the northern part of their range, little corellas nest in hollows in boabs (*Adansonia gregorii*), river gums (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*), large mangroves, cliff cavities and termite mounds. In the southern part of their range they nest in river gum, salmon gum (*E. salmonophloia*), york gum (*E. laxophleba*) and red morell (*E. longicornis*). One to four eggs are laid between March and September.

Hollow availability

At present in the Wheatbelt there are sufficient eucalypts to provide hollows for corellas. However, few new trees have grown during the past 50 years due to grazing by livestock and rabbits and many of the remaining trees 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

Little corellas are sociable birds and are found in pairs or small flocks, aggregating in large flocks when roosting. In the southern part of their range, flocks can contain up to 1,500 birds, while in the Kimberley flocks of 60,000 to 70,000 birds have been recorded. Corellas tend to have traditional roosting sites (usually in dense timber) from which they leave to feed in the morning and return to at night.

In the Kimberley, corellas move about in large flocks, using widespread food resources from the start of the wet season to the middle of the dry season. Food shortages can occur between February and April. Between May and October, when food is more plentiful, the birds disperse into small flocks of between 100 and a few thousand individuals.

Damage

In the Carnarvon area, little corellas cause slight damage to winter crops including melons, sweet corn and dates but the birds often feed on surplus crop left after harvest. In the Ord River area, corellas damage sunflower, sorghum, maize, chickpeas and other crops. This damage usually occurs during the dry season but can also occur at other times of food shortage.

In some areas corellas can become a nuisance around settlements by defoliating trees. They also dig up roots for food on ovals and race tracks, chew wiring and other household fittings and create a nuisance with their loud calls.

Status and damage reduction

The little 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 enables the approval and implementation of a management program in various areas of the state.

As a native species, the little corella is protected under the provisions of the *Wildlife Conservation Act 1950*, administered by DEC. Under this Act corellas 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 Carnarvon, Greenough, Irwin, Mingenew, Morawa, Mullewa, Perenjori and Three Springs. In these areas corella populations are secure and damage to agriculture is likely to be a continual problem.

Outside the open season area, a damage licence must be obtained from DEC prior to shooting. For more information contact DEC and refer to Fauna note No.9. Destruction of birds to reduce damage. DEC, Western Australia.

Destruction should be viewed as a last resort after all other control

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options have been attempted. For other management options see the listed notes. 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. 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.
- [Little Corella](#). Birds in Backyards, Australian Museum.

References

Johnstone, R.E. and Storr, G.M. (1998) Handbook of Western Australian Birds. Volume 1. Non-passerines. WA Museum, Perth.

Smith, G.T. and Moore, L.A. (1991) Foods of corellas *Cacatua pastinator* in Western Australia. *Emu* 91: 87-92.

Beeton, R.J.S. (1985) The little corella: a seasonally adapted species. *Proc. Ecol. Soc. Aust.* 13: 53-63.

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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