



Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo
Recovery Project

Cocky Notes

Issue 16, March 2011



Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo Recovery Project 10 years old

The Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo Recovery Project (CBCRP), one of Birds Australia's longest-running projects, is about to celebrate its 10th anniversary. The project is the longest-running continuous, community-based conservation program for any cockatoo in south-western Australia — and we couldn't have done it without your support!

Since mid-2000, we have worked continuously to protect CBCs by working with landholders to protect critical feeding and breeding habitat on private land, brokering covenants and voluntary management agreements, fencing over 1500 hectares of remnant vegetation and planting future habitat. To further assist the birds, our volunteers have coordinated a successful nest-hollow repair program at a number of critical nesting locations, combined with provision of artificial hollows and competitor control programs, resulting in over 100 hollows once again being available for use by CBCs (for more information, see last page). We have also been a strong advocate for the Cockatoos when clearing of habitat has further threatened these endangered birds.

Of course, to be a successful advocate and to implement appropriate recovery actions for the CBC, it is vital to have a good understanding of what the real-life situation is and what the birds need to survive and flourish in the future. To achieve that, the CBCRP has mapped the species' range, identified nesting locations and threatening processes in the Wheatbelt and monitored nesting hollow occupancy across the species' range.

In 2006 using funds from an anonymous donation we trialled methods for CBC population estimation on the Swan

Coastal Plain. Since then we have worked closely with the Department of Environment and Conservation to run the Great Cocky Count which is running for the second time this year (April 7th).

The CBCRP has also encouraged and led research which has substantially broadened our knowledge of the species. To enhance research on CBCs, we have supported aviary trials to test transmitters and harnesses for use in satellite tracking, and other research, such as examining the Cockatoos' impact on Canola crops.

Another major achievement of the CBCRP over its first 10 years has been our ability to capture the public's imagination through successful community awareness-raising programs and education in schools. This has translated into an enviable level of participation in the annual Great Cocky Count and nesting surveys. By working closely with the Atlas of Living Australia and Gaia Resources to develop an on-line database, we have been able to capitalise on the burgeoning phenomenon of 'Citizen Science', using on-line recording to register records of CBC's. With such

strong public support, a small number of staff work with our many volunteers in metropolitan and regional areas allowing us to plough our scarce monetary resources into where they are needed most — saving the Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo from extinction.

Our achievements are many, but we will not rest on our laurels — we must continue our quest to safeguard the CBC, an iconic species of the South West.

From past and present staff— thank you for your support.



A successfully fledged CBC chick at Yanchep— a sight we all want to see more of!

Photo by Georgina Steytler



Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo: a fully-fledged breeding season

Time seems to have flown by, with another breeding season coming to an end. In the 2010–11 season, surveys were conducted throughout the species' range — northern sites were primarily covered by our wonderful volunteers, while staff focused on the Central Wheatbelt, Great Southern and South Coast regions, where they surveyed existing breeding sites as well as new areas in the hope of identifying previously unknown breeding sites. In a little over four months, a combined total of 175 nest hollows (both potential and confirmed, as well as countless other hollows) were investigated at 34 locations, comprising 19 existing sites, nine newly identified sites and six potential sites. And of course the search continues, with further leads being followed in preparation for the 2011–12 breeding season. Surveys at most sites used the 'knock and observe' method with volunteers and DEC staff assisting by climbing trees at priority IBA's (Important Bird Areas).

At the Fitzgerald River NP IBA, more hens were flushed from hollows than in the previous breeding season (26 hens up from 18 in 2009–10), an encouraging result after the sad events of last year where over 200 CBC perished around Hopetoun. However this increase is likely due to the fact that people conducting the surveys had gained a greater knowledge of the sites they were surveying not that more birds were breeding.

Unfortunately, there appears to be a shortage of food at some of the nesting locations throughout the species' range, and the number of birds seen there continued to decline — at three sites where birds had been recorded breeding in the past, only single active nest-hollows could be found. This illustrates how important it is to conserve areas of remnant vegetation, no matter how small.

As a shining example showing how important small patches of remnant bush can be, the East Borden IBA stands out like a beacon. In late November chicks were recorded in 15 hollows in this 30-hectare patch of bush, including three broods of two chicks, making a total of 18 young. Given that time constraints allowed for only 49 of the 98 known hollows in the area to be checked, it was a fantastic result. With most chicks being around six weeks old, fledging was still a month away, but all were of above-average weight, meaning they are well fed, so we have great hopes of their successful fledging.

The good news continues: after the terrible losses at Koobabbie IBA last year, it was good to see no further decline this season. In fact, there was a slight increase in the numbers recorded there compared to last breeding season, so hope is definitely not lost, even though numbers are still much smaller than they have been in previous years.

We are grateful for the efforts of the Department of Environment and Conservation, which continues to provide wonderful support for the monitoring, with Rick Dawson again climbing trees in the Coomallo, East Borden and Fitzgerald River National Park IBAs. Coomallo Creek was the star site, with nest checks in September coming up with 42 active hollows containing a total of 23 chicks and 44 eggs. Though it was early in the breeding season, this was a promising result.

It was noted at a number of sites that a more-than-usual number of feral Honey Bee hives and swarms were present in 2010. These insects usurp the hollows used by breeding CBC, an added pressure at many sites where hollows are already at a premium.

At the four IBAs, our 'bouncing babies' have contributed to the continuing research into the species: they were all DNA sampled, banded and weighed as usual, although this year they 'donated' blood and swabs for disease testing. This will allow researchers to build up baseline data for chick health (see *Anna LeSouef's article over for details*).

The project's extensive coverage across the South West was made possible through the efforts of our dedicated volunteers. 18 of our long-standing volunteers contributed more than 1000 hours, surveying sites in 12 areas. Without their commitment and extraordinary effort we would not have been able to cover all of the monitoring sites. Landholders and new volunteers also provided much needed assistance in searching for new and surveying known nesting sites in the Central Wheatbelt and Great Southern regions.



Introducing Claire Bartron, our wonderful new Conservation Officer based in Narrogin.

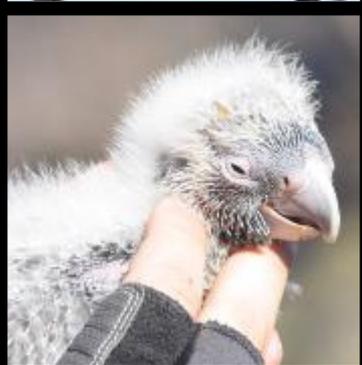
Exciting new reporting tool

Birds Australia, in partnership with the Atlas of Living Australia, has developed a website for reporting Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo sightings. Initially developed as part of a Masters Project from the University of Western Australia to track CBCs using Citizen Science across the Perth Region, 'Carnaby's Tracker' has now been further developed to enable recording detailed sightings across the entire CBC range as well as specific roosting and nesting database portals. The site is still in development and there are more features still to come.

*To use the new Birds Australia Citizen Science Portal go to: <http://birdsaustralia.ala.org.au> and register. Once you've created your own unique account you can report all of your CBC sightings directly, review all of your own sightings and check out the 300 most recent sightings from across the south-west. **Why not give it a go!***



By Perth Zoo



Great Cocky Count 2011: 7 April 2011

After a hugely successful count in 2010, the Great Cocky Count is on again. With your help, last year we nearly doubled the number of known roost sites from just 70 to 129 (although 222 possible roost sites were actually surveyed). This year we are spreading our wings further afield so that we can better understand the movements of Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos across the South West, as well as gain a better understanding of the size of the remaining population, the Great Cocky Count will include overnight roost sites from across the species distribution. This is where we need your help.

An overnight roost site is where the Cockatoos roost or 'sleep' overnight. They usually congregate in tall trees, arriving in noisy flocks at around dusk. If you know where there is a roost site in your area we want to know about it too, as there are very few reports away from the Swan Coastal Plain. If you know of an active roost site, please email Xander at greatcockycount@birdsaustralia.com.au.

We are also looking for as many volunteers as possible to participate in this year's Great Cocky Count to help us get a full-range 'snap shot' of CBC's on the evening of Thursday 7 April. There will also be opportunities for you to participate in follow-up surveys.

Being part of the Great Cocky Count is easy and it's fun. All you have to do is get to your designated roost site about half an hour before dusk and then count the birds as they come home to roost. Once you have counted the total number of birds arriving, you can enter your data straight into our online database at birdsaustralia.ala.org.au, or, if you prefer, you may also submit your count results on a traditional sighting form. Full details about surveying methods and reporting will be given to registered volunteers closer to the count date. If you are interested in being registering, please email Xander (contact details over).

Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo Nestling health study

– Murdoch University/Perth Zoo

By Anna LeSouef

Last November saw the start of a study that will focus on the health of Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo nestlings. The regular monitoring of CBC nests involved DNA sampling, banding and assessing the health of chicks using the weight/age curve (Saunders), but until now these checks have not tested the youngsters for disease or examined their general health. As a result, little is known about the health of CBC in the wild.

Conservation biologists are increasingly recognising the role of disease as a limiting factor in species' survival, particularly as human-related changes increasingly influence the health of endangered populations. Studies of health and diseases are critical components of conservation programs for endangered parrots — they provide baseline data which are important for comparison in the event of environmental disturbance and they also allow researchers to compare different populations. Also, if captive-breeding programs are to become a component of recovery efforts, then the disease status of both captive and wild populations must be understood before considering the release of captive-bred birds.

Three diseases are being investigated by the study: beak and feather disease virus; avian polyomavirus; and *Chlamydia psittaci* (sometimes called psittacosis). These diseases all have the potential to cause devastating declines in populations of wild parrots. The routine nest checks have provided a valuable chance to collect samples which enable us to assess the health of the nestlings. Blood, feathers and swabs from the mouth, eyes and cloaca were taken from 58 nestlings in 2010 and are being tested for evidence of disease. Blood tests have also been used to establish reference ranges for CBC nestlings. Anticipated to run over three years, this study is sure to contribute greatly to our knowledge of wild populations of the Cockatoos.

Want to get involved in the Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo Recovery Project?

With an increasing number of nesting sites that require surveying each year, volunteers are more crucial to the success of the project than ever before. In December a meeting was held with a number of long standing volunteers to initiate a new direction for 2011 with a view to expanding and supporting our volunteer network to increase our coverage of monitoring sites in future breeding seasons. We are looking to recruit new volunteers to help out with organised survey trips to regional sites where they can learn from our experienced volunteers. If you are interested in volunteering in any capacity from administrative tasks to helping out at field days to surveys, please register your interest at

cbcvolunteer@birdsaustralia.com.au

If you want to get involved in the Great Cocky Count please email

greatcockycount@birdsaustralia.com.au

Nesting hollow repairs for Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos

By John Lauri

As trees age, some hollows may eventually become unsuitable for nesting by Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos, usually due to the trunk splitting, which often exposes the nest chamber or the base of the tree. These hollows can often be repaired by nailing or screwing a sheet of galvanised tin around the trunk and then repacking the hollow with termite castings or a similar substance. Where hollow repairs are a viable option, they are a simple, quick and cheap way of extending the useful life of nest-trees for many years. So far, all repaired hollows have remained inhabitable for at least six years (except in trees that have been blown over).

Between 2004 and 2006, a team of three volunteers from Birds Australia repaired 170 trees around Badgingarra, Coorow and Calingiri, and they have monitored those hollows and other adjacent nests each year since. This monitoring has shown that CBCs readily accept the repaired hollows, in fact they are just as likely to breed in a repaired hollow as in an adjacent natural (unrepaired) one. An average of 31 nesting hollows are occupied each year around Coorow in the Koobabbie IBA. Monitoring the occupancy of these hollows between 2005 and 2008 has shown that 50% (15 out of 30) of the repaired hollows were occupied, while only 31% (12/39) of natural hollows were used, and CBC

bred in an average of 3.75 of 7 artificial hollows. Where hollow repairs have been carried out in areas with no previous records of CBCs nesting, none has been used, which is consistent with artificial hollows hung in areas where breeding has not been recorded previously. In short, repairing damaged nest-hollows appears not to attract Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos to an area, but in breeding areas it is a cheap and excellent way to maintain adequate hollows for as long as the trees remain standing.



Hen flying out of repaired hollow

By John Lauri



Birds Australia
CONSERVATION THROUGH KNOWLEDGE

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Unless stated otherwise, all articles and photos are by Raana Scott and Claire Bartron.

This Birds Australia project has received funding from the Government of Western Australia through the State NRM Program, the Department of Environment and Conservation and South Coast NRM.

Birds Australia gratefully acknowledges the support of the Project Advisory Group, WWF-Australia, and groups affiliated with Gondwana Link to provide the project with support and expertise. Cocky Notes is produced with funding from the State NRM program. Articles printed represent the views of the author, not necessarily those of the publisher.



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