

Cocky Notes

Issue 17 June 2012



Photo: K. Lightbody

THE WINGS OF CHANGE

2012 is an exciting year for our Cocky Conservation projects in WA. We started the year with a name change, as Birds Australia merged with Bird Observation and Conservation Australia to form **Australia's largest bird conservation organisation**, BirdLife Australia. We have a new logo, and we have a new look newsletter, but under this beats the heart of the old organisation, and we are as committed as ever to conserving our threatened cockatoos.

And it seems that we just keep getting busier. Currently, we are working on-ground with funding from the **Australian Government's Caring for our Country program**, and three of WA's regional natural resource management (NRM) groups and agencies. These are South Coast NRM, Perth Region NRM and State NRM.

As always, we're grateful for the generosity of all our funders and for in-kind contributions from the Department of Environment and Conservation, our partner in some projects. We are working on-ground in parts of the Wheatbelt, in particular in the south east, and also in the Perth region, where we are working with the Dieback Working Group. Since December last year, four new staff have joined our cocky conservation program: we warmly welcome Matt, Tam, Sandra and Deb to the team.

Cheryl Gole

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Do you live in the south east Wheatbelt?

We need your help! BirdLife Australia has commenced a new project in the south east Wheatbelt region of WA.

Do Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos visit your farm?

Do you have large, old Salmon Gums on your property?

Please contact us!

Sandra (Albany): 9842 0003 or 0447 425 237

Deb (Esperance): 9076 2203 or 0427 987 085

See '*Carnaby's in the south east Wheatbelt*' in this newsletter

SOUTH WEST AUSTRALIA'S THREATENED COCKATOOS

There are four cockatoos in south west Australia that are not doing as well as they should. All are listed as threatened; three of them are black-cockatoos, and one is a corella. BirdLife Australia is developing its on-ground conservation program for all four species.



Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo is our 'Wheatbelt' White-tailed Black-Cockatoo. It mostly nests in wandoo and salmon gum in the cooler months. In the drier part of the year, most birds move closer to the coast where they feed in shrubland and banksia woodlands. They also love pine cones and some weed seeds such as wild radish and wild geranium. (Photo: C. Nealon)



Baudin's Black-Cockatoo is the other White-tailed Black-Cockatoo; it's a forest cockatoo that is confined to the forests of the deep south west and the Darling Range near Perth. Its long top bill helps it to neatly get seeds out of marri and jarrah nuts, but unfortunately it also has a taste for the seeds of apples and pears. It is illegal to shoot Baudin's Cockatoos, but netting orchards or scaring are useful techniques. (Photo: K. Lightbody)



The **Forest Redtail** is south west Australia's only Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo. Although there are other redtails further north (e.g. in the northern Wheatbelt) and their populations are secure, this one is threatened, and is continuing to decline. In recent years, it has become very noticeable in the Perth area where it now feeds on the seeds of cape lilacs. (Photo: K. Lightbody)



Muir's Corella is Australia's only threatened corella. Once numerous in the Perth area and the deep south west, it was driven close to extinction when early European colonists poisoned and shot the bird that developed a taste for their germinating grain crops. Its stronghold is still the area east of Manjimup and Frankland. (Photo: M. Lauva)

A COUNT TO REMEMBER

When setting off to participate in the 2012 Great Cocky Count, little did I know that the count would be firmly etched into my memory forever! Taking up position with property owners Anne and Shane O'Neill at their olive farm at Myrup near Esperance, and with observers Drewe Vincent and Ron Mannix, we would be witness to a spectacular sight. One long ago said to 'blacken the skies'. A flock of over 1000 Carnaby's!

It seemed that everywhere we looked, on water troughs, on the ground alongside, atop fences and in nearly every tree was the Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo. You can imagine the noise filling the air.

After their initial arrival to the property, mainly from the west, they watered at stock troughs in open

paddocks before flying lazily past us in small groups, for an effortless count. Some took the time to fly low and erratically around us as if to get a better look. For a brief moment we were in fear of them all taking to the air at once but they couldn't have been better behaved for a count! The olive grove is bordered on one side with a blue gum plantation, where the birds roosted and on another side by a pine plantation. As the darkness fell and the last bird call faded, we rallied inside the house to tally the count and sample the olive farm's delicious wares.

We couldn't have been more excited and privileged, and to this day our experience continues to provide much enthusiastic conversation between us all.

Deb Sullivan

THE GREAT COCKY COUNT

The Great Cocky Count (GCC), organised by BirdLife Australia in partnership with the Department of Environment and Conservation, aims to count as many **Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos** at their night-time roost sites as possible on a single night each year in April.

Results from the 2011 GCC showed a dramatic drop in numbers in the Perth area in just one year, with a 37% decrease in the number of roosting cockatoos counted from 2010 to 2011.

Thanks to the efforts of 270 volunteers across south west WA, another successful GCC was held on 15 April 2012. This was the fourth count conducted, and the third using a standard method. The survey was helped enormously by the support of regional coordinators in Geraldton, Esperance, Albany, Bunbury, Yanchep and Narrogin, plus a number of people rallying the troops in their local areas to report new roost sites.

Most known CBC roosts are in the Swan Region (i.e. Yanchep to Mandurah and east into the Darling Range) as this is where our efforts have focused over the last three surveys. The region is considered core feeding habitat for northern and western populations of over-wintering cockatoos. However, the survey is growing through the addition of more regional roost sites.

Other key findings from the 2011 GCC (full report and summary available at www.birdlife.org.au/carnabys) include:

- 185 sites surveyed, of which 64 sites had roosting cockatoos
- Statistical modelling estimated the population in the Swan Region was between 5,200 and 8,600 birds. A year earlier it was estimated that the population was 8,000 to 10,000.
- Number of small roosts (less than 150 birds) increased by 66% from 2010 to 2011, whereas the number of large roosts (150+ birds) decreased by 42% from 2010 to 2011.
- Average number of cockatoos per roost site decreased from 165 in 2010 to only 78 in 2011.

The results from the 2012 GCC, which will be available later this year, will provide important information on the current status of the population overwintering in Perth, and will help determine if the result seen in the previous year was a real population decline or just an annual variation.



Photo: D. Sullivan

Over 1000 birds were counted at Myrup, near Esperance

The GCC is funded by Perth Region NRM through the **Australian Government's Caring for our Country** program, and will take place again in 2013. To get involved or to pass on information about new cockatoo roost locations, contact Tamara Kabat on 9287 2204 or greatcockycount@birdlife.org.au

Tamara Kabat

TIME TO EVALUATE

Now in its 11th year, the **Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo Recovery Project** is a wonderful example of a long-running, continuous community-based conservation program. The Recovery Project is a BirdLife Australia project, with support from many organisations including the Department of Environment and Conservation, NRM groups and landcare groups. Much has been done to protect and manage critical breeding and feeding habitat, and in raising awareness about this iconic species.



Photo: E. Adams

A State NRM funded project is now providing the opportunity for BirdLife Australia to evaluate the Recovery Project, since its on-ground conservation work commenced in 2001. The evaluation will review achievements and project activities, and assess the effectiveness of the program in meeting its aims and objectives. Importantly, it will attempt to determine **what worked and what didn't, and identify any unexpected outcomes**. The review will be largely focused on the Wheatbelt region, where a number of priority sites exist, and many on-ground recovery actions have been carried out.

Work to date has concentrated on planning and developing the evaluation questions, and gathering reports and project resources from the last ten years. An important realisation has been that the evaluation is not about finding out about everything, but about asking the right questions and finding the things that we really need to know.

An evaluation report will directly inform BirdLife Australia's future recovery efforts, and provide the learnings to funding bodies, government agencies, and non-government organisations. This will not only help to strengthen BirdLife Australia's **Carnaby's Recovery Project**, but should also benefit the delivery of community based conservation programs elsewhere.

Matt Fossey

CARNABY'S IN THE SOUTH EAST WHEATBELT

The area between the Fitzgerald River National Park, and the nature reserves of Lake Magenta, Dragon Rocks, Dunn Rock and Lake King, is some of the **Wheatbelt's most important nesting habitat for Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos**.



BirdLife Australia's cockatoo conservation team is working hard to help Carnaby's within this area. We are keen to hear from farmers, NRM officers, local government workers and members of the community to help us.

We want to hear from you if:

- You know you've got cockies nesting on your farm, or the birds regularly feed there.
- You've got salmon gums on your farm and you're not sure whether or not the cockies nest in them.
- You're interested in participating in this project and doing some on-ground work for them.
- You'd like to fence off some bush being used by cockies.
- You'd like to plant a corridor between bits of bush being used by cockies.
- You think that the galahs or feral bees are taking over important nesting hollows for Carnaby's on your land.

We'd also love to hear from people who can help in other ways:

- Volunteering to help with nest surveys.
- Helping to repair old nest hollows.
- Providing information about nesting cockies throughout this area.

Contact us now:

Sandra: sandra.gilfillan@birdlife.org.au or phone 9842 2003 or 0447 425 237.

Deb: deb.sullivan@birdlife.org.au or phone 9076 2203 or 0427 987 085.

MANAGING HABITAT ON THE SWAN COASTAL PLAIN

A new BirdLife Australia project focussing on **improving habitat management for Carnaby's and Baudin's Black-Cockatoos** on the Swan Coastal Plain is underway. With funding from Perth Region NRM via **the Australian Government's** Caring for our Country program, this is the first time BirdLife Australia is leading on-ground works for cockatoos in the region.

The Swan Coastal Plain's **Banksia woodlands** provide core feeding habitat during winter for northern and western populations of **Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo**. The Jarrah-Marri forests of the Perth Hills and foothills are a **vital habitat for Baudin's Black-Cockatoo**. Increasing habitat clearance and fragmentation are a major threat to these cockatoos.

The project aims to encourage and support landholders in the Perth area to manage their land for black-cockatoos. We will provide suitable plants for food and roosting trees, and address issues such as weed invasion. On-ground works will focus particularly on areas surrounding priority roosting sites identified through the Great Cocky Count. The project has links with the Department of Environment and Conservation's **Jandakot Airport offset restoration** works.

BirdLife Australia will work closely with the Dieback Working Group to raise awareness about *Phytophthora* dieback and its impact on black-cockatoo habitat. This widespread and increasing disease has a serious impact on the Banksia woodlands and Jarrah forests that support the cockatoos.

The project will also work with nurseries to encourage gardeners to plant local native plants that provide black-cockatoo food and habitat, and to improve *Phytophthora* dieback management in nurseries.

Tamara Kabat



Photo: M. Cake

A NEST BOX HOME IN THE PERTH HILLS

One of the many pleasures of living in the Perth hills is being able to observe black-cockatoos going about their lives. To help out these wonderful birds we **installed two nest boxes. One, a 'Cockatube' supplied by Landcare, was clad in wood and was claimed by a pair of Carnaby's within days.**

We watched this pair daily from October 2011 to March 2012 when we were fortunate enough to see their chick, **which we named 'Rocket'**, take his maiden flight. We had been watching the parents feed Rocket on top of the nest box for a week, and he was clearly becoming more adventurous. On the final days he flapped his wings and called when the parents departed. Then, on the last day Rocket climbed onto a branch and we knew that he would not set foot on his nest again. Just on dusk the parents called from some distance away. Rocket answered, and almost before we knew it he was airborne, wobbly and uncertain but maintaining height. He called once as he flew over the house, then was gone. We missed watching our pair, **but they will be back and maybe in four years' time** Rocket will come back with a mate of his own, looking for a nest hollow.

Kay Griffiths



'Rocket' the Carnaby's chick on his last day at the nest

(Photo: K. Griffiths)

HOUSE HUNTING

Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo breeding season is fast approaching and soon some of you will be saying goodbye to the birds for the winter whilst others will be welcoming them home, as they return to their nesting areas to breed.

If you suspect breeding Carnaby's on your property or nearby, there is some helpful information you can gather to assist BirdLife in understanding and conserving this bird:

- What date did they arrive and how many did you see?
- The general direction of flight to and from nests (this helps us to work out where they are feeding and/or breeding).
- The location of the trees where the birds roost at night and the location of trees with hollows.

Recording some of these basics will provide Birdlife staff and volunteers with detailed and up to date information when we are visiting new and known nesting sites. These records can help us save time in locating nests and identifying important local habitat for the cockatoos, and is much appreciated during the busy nesting season.

It is important to try to confirm the locations of the tree or trees that the birds are nesting in first.

Early in the breeding season you may notice small flocks made up of several mated pairs. Sighting these small flocks regularly may mean you are near a breeding site.

Once at nesting sites, these pairs inspect various hollows for suitability. The female investigates the real estate options and her mate acts as a sentry. Female birds will also chew the entrance of hollows as they inspect them. As the season progresses, females will choose their hollow, lay their eggs and remain in the hollow for nearly 2 months while the egg develops and the chick is very young.

You may also notice small flocks of males commuting between nesting sites and feeding areas, collecting food for their growing families (morning and afternoon are the most reliable times to see this). Males will call on arrival back to the site and females will join their partners for a noisy bout of feeding.

Later in the season, the flocks will grow as the female joins her partner in collecting food for their growing chick. At this time you may hear the chick begging for food from within the hollow chamber.

If you see any Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos that you suspect or know to be nesting on or near your property, please contact either Tam Kabat (9287 2204) for Perth region, Sandra Gilfillan (9842 0003) in Albany or Deb Sullivan (9076 2203) in Esperance.

Deb Sullivan



Photo: C. Bartron

Female Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo in a nesting hollow

TRACKING CARNABY'S BLACK-COCKATOOS

Satellite tracking devices have been fitted to 11 rehabilitated Carnaby's Cockatoos. They are providing an insight into the daily lives of Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo that hasn't previously been possible. The data gathered so far has revealed previously unknown roost sites, daily movement patterns and record breaking travel distances.

In less than a month, cockatoos released at Perry Lakes have travelled all the way to Morangup in the Perth Hills and as far south as Lake Preston.



Photo: C. Groom

The cocky conservation team

Matt Fossey, Threatened Cockatoos Project Manager

Matt currently manages our Carnaby's projects and will be helping to expand our work to include all threatened cockatoos in the south west. Any general enquiries can be directed to Matt at matt.fossey@birdlife.org.au

Tamara Kabat, Black-Cockatoo Conservation Officer

Tam works on our project in the Perth region and also coordinates the Great Cocky Count. Contact Tam about getting involved, or if you work with a group interested in on-ground work for cockies. tamara.kabat@birdlife.org.au

Sandra Gilfillan, Senior Carnaby's Conservation Officer

Sandra is based in Albany and works with Deb Sullivan on our newest project in the south east Wheatbelt. Contact Sandra if you're a farmer, or work in local government or NRM and are interested in participating in this project. sandra.gilfillan@birdlife.org.au

Deb Sullivan, Carnaby's Conservation Officer

Deb is based in Esperance and works with Sandra Gilfillan on our newest project in the south east Wheatbelt. Contact Deb if you're a farmer, or work in local government or NRM and are interested in participating in this project. deb.sullivan@birdlife.org.au

Of those released at Yanchep, some are enjoying the nearby pine plantation whilst others have travelled further afield. The released cockatoos have also had part of the white panels of their tail feathers coloured pink or blue and marked with an individual identifying letter. You can help by looking out for them.

If you'd like to follow the progress of Christine's project please visit carnabyscockatoo.blogspot.com.au

Christine Groom



Photo: C. Groom

Watch those tails and legs

Carnaby's Cockatoos with tail feathers painted pink or blue can tell us where they are moving. If you see one, please call 0409 087 631 or email christine.groom@dec.wa.gov.au

Some Carnaby's have metal leg bands with numbers that are readable through good binoculars. If you read the number on a leg band or photograph it with a telephoto lens, the information can help us know where the bird came from. Please call 0428 762 292 or email carnabys@birdlife.org.au

Cheryl Gole, WA Program Manager

Cheryl is the Perth-based manager for BirdLife Australia's WA funded projects, including our cockatoo projects. Contact Cheryl for questions about the program, particularly threatened cockatoos in the deep south west. cheryl.gole@birdlife.org.au

Raana Scott is currently on maternity leave, after bringing her own chick into the world in May. Congratulations to Raana and Dylan, and welcome Otis Jack.



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Department of Environment and Conservation



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