

Cocky Notes

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WRAP-UP OF THE 2012 CARNABY'S BREEDING SEASON

The 2012 breeding season has come and gone, and **once again BirdLife Australia's Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo Recovery Project** coordinated nesting surveys throughout the range of the species.

Last year's surveys were carried out mainly on private properties and shire reserves. Sites in the south east Wheatbelt were covered by project officers Sandra Gilfillan and Deb Sullivan as part of **their project work in the region (see 'Surveying in the south east Wheatbelt' in this newsletter)**. Surveys of the remaining breeding sites were undertaken by volunteers, landholders, DEC and Perth-based project staff.

Between September and November, at least 500 natural and artificial hollows were investigated at 45 locations (outside the south east Wheatbelt), comprising 36 existing sites, six newly identified sites and three **potential nesting sites**. The **'tap-and-flush' survey method** was used at most sites. A total of 37 females were flushed from hollows or confirmed to be nesting. Further, a survey by Dr Denis Saunders and Rick Dawson recorded 76 breeding attempts at a single site in the northern Wheatbelt (Coomallo Creek).

Tragically, at another site considered a priority for **Carnaby's conservation**, eight females were found dead or sick in hollows and on the ground nearby.

Similar losses were observed at the same site in 2009. All of the affected birds were delivered to DEC for investigation. Other farmers have also noticed large declines in the number of cockatoos nesting on their properties in recent years.

Thank you to all volunteers and landholders who dedicated their time to participate in nesting surveys. We look forward to doing it all again in 2013. A special thanks to our Volunteer Coordinator **Cathie O'Neill** for allocating sites and organising volunteers, and to Brett Glossop for preparing the maps of known breeding sites. The 2012 surveys were supported by funding from the WA **Government's** State NRM Program.

Matt Fossey

SURVEYING IN THE SOUTH EAST WHEATBELT

Time has flown by considerably more quickly than a **Carnaby's Cockatoo** and we have reached the end of the breeding season in the south east Wheatbelt region. Our 2012 nesting surveys focused mainly on private landholdings within a cluster of four Important Bird Areas.



Photo: A. Ricks

Project Officers Deb Sullivan and Sandra Gilfillan fuelling up during the Carnaby's breeding season

Surveys were carried out in 57 locations, with 10 known sites producing breeding birds and a further four sites newly identified. New leads were also opened up for next breeding

season while other sites had potential nesting hollows, but no cockies were observed at the time of visiting. Despite the survey effort, there is still a lack of knowledge about the distribution and usage of sites by Carnaby's within the project area.

Two days of surveying were also conducted in the stunning surroundings of the large timber reserve, Cocanarup. This site produced the largest amount of breeding activity, though the number of nesting birds was down on last year's results. Thank you to the dedicated band of volunteers that assisted with the campout at Cocanarup in the first week of October.

The next steps for this Caring for our Country funded project are to decide on the appropriate recovery actions at priority breeding and feeding sites and to begin negotiations with the relevant farmers.

Deb Sullivan

BLACK-COCKATOOS TARGETED IN CONSERVATION ACTION PLANS

A series of Conservation Action Plans (CAPs) underway on the South Coast have nominated the three species of black-cockatoos occurring in this area (Carnaby's, Baudin's and Forest Red-tailed) as conservation targets. There is an overlap of the range of these species in the agricultural matrix linking the Walpole Wilderness Area, the Stirling Range and Porongurup National Parks and a number of coastal reserves and national parks east of Albany.

Over the past couple of years a number of groups have been getting together to brainstorm what critical threats and interventions are required to improve the status of key species and ecosystems of value to them, and cockatoos have popped up as priorities during each of these processes. The methodology being used helps to identify strategic biodiversity actions which are monitored by indicators to see if the actions being taken are working or not.

During the process of developing these CAPs, the drying climate, fragmentation due to historical clearing and a loss of food sources within foraging distance of nesting sites were the top-ranked threats for black-cockatoos. A range of strategies is currently being planned or implemented.

Any information or assistance that could help groups with these strategies would be welcome.



Carnaby's and Forest Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos

Please contact NRM organisations at individual Catchment Groups; contact details are on their websites:

Oyster Harbour Catchment Group (www.ohcg.org.au)

Wilson Inlet Catchment Committee Inc.
(www.wicc.southcoastwa.org.au)

Gillamii Centre (www.gillamii.org.au)

Barry Heydenrych*
Greening Australia/Gondwana Link

*Barry Heydenrych has been assisting groups develop CAPs which can be viewed at <http://conpro.tnc.org/> (search by scrolling to find projects listed under Gondwana Link)

MORE SUCCESS FROM PERTH HILLS NEST BOXES

Our June 2012 edition of *Cocky Notes* featured an article by landholder Kay Griffiths about the two nest boxes she installed for Carnaby's, and the successful fledging of a chick in March 2012. By the start of last year's breeding season, Kay had four nest boxes installed on their property. Over the holiday season, three chicks fledged — two Carnaby's and one Forest Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo. The fourth nest box had an unhatched egg, possibly from a very young female. Two further nest boxes have been installed and have received a lot of attention already. Watch this space for an update next year!

PLANTS FOR CARNABY'S BLACK-COCKATOO WORKSHOP

A very successful workshop about revegetation for **Carnaby's** was held in November 2012. The workshop was attended by nearly 50 people from community groups, local government and larger landholders.

Teagan Johnston, DEC employee and ECU Masters student, who has been studying what Carnaby's eat on the Swan Coastal Plain, spoke about what to consider in a revegetation project. Information was also presented on how to help provide habitat for **Carnaby's and other black-cockatoos** and on the Phytophthora Dieback that affects cockatoo habitat.

The highlight of the day was a talk by farmer Sarah Mason, who was involved in BirdLife Australia's proteaceous species planting trial in 2006. She provided excellent details on what worked and **didn't work as part of the trial and her own attempts** since then, particularly noting that planting species not occurring naturally in the area means the cockatoos may not recognise them as suitable food.

We hope to run another of these workshops in 2013. You can download plant lists and the workshop handout from our website www.birdlife.org.au/carnabys/plants-for-carnabys.

Tamara Kabat



Carnaby's feeding on banksia

'CHOOSE FOR BLACK-COCKATOOS' NURSERY PLANT LABEL

Coming in March! BirdLife Australia and the Dieback Working Group are launching a new plant label to help people provide habitat for Carnaby's in their

own gardens. We're working with native nurseries accredited by the NIASA scheme, which ensures good hygiene practices that prevents the spread of Dieback. The pilot project is targeting plants suitable for the Perth region. For more information, watch our website

www.birdlife.org.au/carnabys/plants-for-carnabys.

Tamara Kabat



Banksia prionotes (top left), *Banksia menziesii* (top right) and *Hakea trifurcata* (bottom)

2013 GREAT COCKY COUNT — SUNDAY 7 APRIL AT SUNSET

Join up for WA's biggest survey for Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo! The fifth Great Cocky Count (GCC) will take place for one hour at sunset on Sunday 7 April. This community-driven annual survey aims to count **as many Carnaby's as possible at their night-time roost sites** on a single night each April.

Roosts are places where black-cockatoos rest at night. Important information on the location of critical roosting habitat for cockatoos is collected through the GCC, and is increasing with every survey completed. The 2012 GCC found that in the Perth region, where we have three years of continuous, robust survey data, there has been a 40% decline **in the number of Carnaby's** since 2010.

Survey sites are located all over the South West, so **there's a good chance there's a spot nearby that needs you!** Get more information and register as a volunteer at www.birdlife.org.au/carnabys/great-cocky-count.

We need to find more night roosts for both white-tailed and red-tailed cockies. To tell us about a roost site, contact Tamara Kabat on 9287 2204 or 0457 333 177 or greatcockycount@birdlife.org.au.

The Great Cockey Count is funded by Perth Region NRM through the Australian Government's Caring for Our Country program.

Tamara Kabat



Photo: V. Gruenwald-Schwark

A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS

Monitoring should be a key component of any conservation program. It enables us to determine how ecosystems and species of conservation interest are changing in relation to baseline data, and at what rate. Monitoring also provides an assessment of the effectiveness of management or recovery actions undertaken.

One simple, effective way of documenting changes to sites is through the use of photo-monitoring points. This is a series of photographs of a particular site taken at regular intervals, providing information on changes occurring at that site. To ensure that images taken from these points give the best opportunity for comparison, the photos need to be taken under the same conditions, for example, time of day, from the same point (permanently marked), in the same direction, and with the same camera settings. Each photo also needs a good set of notes to go with it.

Photo-monitoring points are often used to measure change in slow processes, particularly vegetation structure over a long **timeframe**. In the Carnaby's



An example of photo points used to monitor changes in revegetation (photos: Amanda Keesing, Gondwana Link)

Black-Cockatoo Recovery Project, photo points are being used to monitor vegetation change (feeding and breeding habitat). For example, following a proteaceous species planting trial in the northern Wheatbelt in 2006, photo points on several properties have shown how food plants for **Carnaby's have survived and grown**.

Dr Dennis Saunders from CSIRO also used photo points as a method to monitor decline in Salmon Gum woodland at Coomallo Creek, an important **Carnaby's** Black-Cockatoo breeding site, between 1978 and 1997. Over the period of the study the photo points, along with other information collected, showed there was a serious decline in the condition of the trees, with few large trees left in good condition by 1997.

A comprehensive and detailed outline of how to develop and carry out a photo monitoring program for detecting change in vegetation communities can be found in *Wildlife Notes* No. 9 July 2001 (available for download from <http://www.dec.wa.gov.au/publications/2.html>).

Sandra Gilfillan

CARNABY'S THROUGH THE EYES OF A VISITING GERMAN SCIENTIST

I recently had the pleasure to spend seven months in Perth with my family. As an environmental engineer and an environmental manager from Kiel in Germany, I was enthusiastic about gaining some professional experience in Western Australia. I was **particularly fascinated about BirdLife Australia's Carnaby's Recovery Project, because wild parrots don't occur in Germany at all** and I had previous experience with management projects of endangered bird species. My first opportunities to **view Carnaby's were at Caversham Wildlife Park** and Perth Zoo, but I wanted to observe them in the wild.

After negotiating a volunteer position with the Recovery Project, my first duty was to enter survey forms into an Excel database. The surveys recorded information on night-time roosting behaviour and

numbers, as well as use of nesting hollows during the breeding season. Before I conducted surveys during the breeding season, I observed my first **Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos** in an old eucalypt forest north of Albany. I was impressed by these beautiful birds, their shape in the sky and the white-black tail resembling Indian jewellery.

During my first Carnaby's nesting survey with Tamara Kabat near Lake Clifton in October, we only observed two cockatoos passing overhead but it was exciting to get an impression of their habitat in the Tuart forest and to investigate potential nesting hollows using the tap and flush method.

On a windy and stormy day in November, I had the opportunity to attend another field trip to the northern Wheatbelt with Matt Fossey. We visited three farmers who had **Carnaby's** nesting and feeding on their properties. The farmers were all open-minded towards actions to support the black-cockatoos. **While we didn't observe any nesting birds, we were fortunate to see about 60 Carnaby's** feeding on Marri trees on the edge of the Great Northern Highway. This day reminded me of my work with the farmers in the Important Bird Area 'Eider-Treene-Sorge-Lowland' in Schleswig-Holstein in northern Germany.

I am so pleased that I could acquire some **professional experience on the Carnaby's Project** at BirdLife Australia and look forward to returning one day to one of the world's biodiversity hotspots. I am especially very thankful to Tam and Matt for the friendly welcome and the excellent support. I will greatly miss the BirdLife Australia team and wish them all the best for the future.

Veronika Gruenwald-Schwark



Tamara Kabat and Veronika Gruenwald-Schwark in Tuart forest near Lake Clifton

You can help track black-cockatoos

Did you know that leg bands on birds have important information on them? Leg bands on **Carnaby's** have numbers inscribed into them that tell us where those birds were banded. That means they have the potential to tell us where the birds move — and that is fairly rare information. **You can help!** When you're looking at **Carnaby's** with binoculars, or if they are quite close, check out their lower legs. If they have bands on them, try to photograph the leg band with as high a resolution shot as possible. Take lots of shots and keep them all in case angled shots are useful for identifying some of the numbers on the band. If you get any photos, contact Matt Fossey on **9287 2251** or **matt.fossey@birdlife.org.au**. Even knowing the location can help!

Photo: R. Dawson



AN EVENING TALKING BLACK-COCKATOOS

The Darling Range Branch of the Wildflower Society of WA was pleased to have Matt Fossey from BirdLife Australia to give a presentation to our Group on the threatened black-cockatoos of the South West.

It was interesting to note some of the differences between our three species. **Carnaby's and Baudin's** look similar, but can be distinguished by the shape of their bills (**Baudin's** has a longer, more tapered upper bill) and their calls. Also, when foraging on **Marri**, **Baudin's** extracts the seeds causing very little damage to the nuts while **Carnaby's** breaks the rims from the nuts.

Maps illustrated the distribution of each species, and information was given about life cycles and seasonal movements throughout the region. Black-cockatoos form strong pair bonds and mate for life.

A number of threats are causing populations of all three species to continue to decline. It was pointed out that Baudin's has a tendency to feed on fruits such as apples and pears, making them a target for some orchardists.

I would encourage other interested community groups to contact BirdLife Australia and learn more about our black-cockatoos.

Lynda Tomlinson
Wildflower Society of WA (Darling Range Branch)



Photo: K. Lightbody

Baudin's Black-Cockatoo extracting the seed from a Marri nut

The Cocky Conservation Team

Matt Fossey, Threatened Cockatoos Project Manager

Matt currently manages our Carnaby's projects and is based in Perth. Any general enquiries can be directed to Matt.

matt.fossey@birdlife.org.au or (08) 9287 2251

Tamara Kabat, Black-Cockatoo Conservation Officer

Tam works on our project in the Perth region and also coordinates the Great Cocky Count.

tamara.kabat@birdlife.org.au or (08) 9287 2204

Sandra Gilfillan, Senior Carnaby's Conservation Officer

Sandra is based in Albany and works with Deb Sullivan on our project in the south east Wheatbelt.

sandra.gilfillan@birdlife.org.au or (08) 9842 0003

Deb Sullivan, Carnaby's Conservation Officer

Deb is based in Esperance and works with Sandra Gilfillan on our project in the south east Wheatbelt.

deb.sullivan@birdlife.org.au or (08) 9076 2203

Cheryl Gole, WA Program Manager

Cheryl is the Perth-based manager for BirdLife Australia's WA funded projects. Contact Cheryl for questions about the WA program.

cheryl.gole@birdlife.org.au or 0428 934 958

DO YOU HAVE PHOTOS OF COCKATOOS IN URBAN SETTINGS?

BirdLife Australia is looking for good-quality photos of black-cockatoos in the city and in urban settings for a new community resource. We're after photos of Carnaby's, Baudin's and Red-tails showing a range of activities, including in flight over urban areas, drinking in parks and suburban gardens, and perched on buildings. Any of the photos used will be credited. Please send your photos to Cheryl Gole at cheryl.gole@birdlife.org.au



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