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Species Fact Sheet: Carnaby's black cockatoo



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Carnaby's black-cockatoo

Calyptorhynchus latirostris

Carnaby's black cockatoos are found only in Western Australia and are one of only two species of white-tailed black cockatoo found anywhere in the world. The other is Baudin's black cockatoo. Both of these species are unique to south-west Australia.



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Conservation status

The World Conservation Union (IUCN) Redlist of Threatened Species:
Endangered

Australian Government - *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*:
Endangered

Did you know?

- Carnaby's black cockatoos pair for life.
- When a Carnaby's black cockatoo chick leaves the nest it is the size of an adult and can weigh more.
- You can tell the difference between a male and a female by the colour of their beaks. Females have grey beaks and males have black beaks.
- Carnaby's black cockatoo numbers have declined by at least 50 per cent over the last 45 years.

Distribution and habitat

Carnaby's black cockatoos are found in south-west Australia. They are commonly seen in some areas, for example the coastal plain to the north of Perth and some areas of the northern wheatbelt, but are locally extinct in others, such as in many parts of the central wheatbelt.

In the wheatbelt during the nesting season Carnaby's black cockatoos occur in un-cleared or remnant eucalypt woodlands, predominately salmon gum or white gum (wandoo). They feed in heathland (called Kwongan heath), on different types of banksia, grevillea, hakea and dryandra species. They also feed on seeds of eucalyptus species, and introduced species such as wild radish and pines. During the non-nesting season Carnaby's black cockatoos predominately occur in banksia woodlands, coastal and near-coastal scrub and forests and introduced pine trees of the coastal regions.

Ecology and life cycle

Carnaby's black cockatoos are large black cockatoos with white patches on their cheeks and white bands on their tails. They have strong short bills designed to cope with the hard nuts and seeds that form their diet. There is little difference between the male and female birds apart from bill and eye ring colour. Males have red eye rings and black bills whereas females have grey eye rings and a lighter grey or bone-coloured bills.

Carnaby's black cockatoos are a very mobile species with movements throughout the year determined by nesting and feeding needs. From early summer through autumn to winter the cockatoos live in higher rainfall coastal or near coastal areas in large flocks. July is the beginning of the move back out to the wheatbelt in search of suitable nesting hollows. The nesting season lasts from late winter through spring and into early summer when the cycle begins again.

Threats

There are a number of threats that have contributed to the decline in population numbers including habitat loss and competitive species.

Habitat loss

Extensive clearing of native bush in the wheatbelt has led to a severe reduction in available nesting and feeding trees. In some cases, nesting and feeding areas are too far apart for the birds to successfully raise chicks.

The original food sources for Carnaby's black cockatoos on the Swan Coastal Plain have been largely replaced by urban development and introduced pine plantations that the cockatoos have utilised for food. However these plantations will be removed in the future, posing additional conservation problems.

Habitat degradation

Remaining nesting and feeding areas are becoming degraded due to grazing, water logging, salinity, weed invasion, storm damage, firewood collection and changes in fire management. There is a lack of new eucalypt trees growing to replace dead trees in remaining nesting sites, and there is also a worrying deterioration of existing nesting hollows.

Competitive species

Carnaby's black cockatoos face competition for hollows from other species that use hollows to nest in, particularly the galah, western long-billed and little corellas. In addition to these, feral bees also pose problems when they use suitable nests for their hives.

Conservation action

WWF-Australia, through the Threatened Species Network - a community-based program of the Australian Government and WWF-Australia, has been involved with a number of initiatives to aid in the recovery of Australia's threatened black cockatoo and has funded two Carnaby's black cockatoo TSN Community Grant projects.

Currently, WWF is in a collaborative partnership with Birds Australia to deliver the Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo Recovery Project. The project, led by Birds Australia, is implementing key recovery actions for Carnaby's black-cockatoo, in accordance with the strategies identified in the Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo Recovery Plan. The main activities of the project include protecting, connecting and enhancing breeding and feeding habitat (through fencing, management guidelines, conservation agreements and revegetation) in the wheatbelt. Raising community awareness of the conservation status and ways to become involved in key recovery actions would also aid this species. It's also recommended that monitoring breeding activity through the involvement of Birds Australia volunteers takes place, and advocating to government and landholders for protection of critical habitat both in their wheatbelt breeding sites and foraging sites on the Swan Coastal Plain and other near-coastal habitats.

How you can help

- Protect and conserve known nesting habitat by fencing or excluding stock, protecting woodlands against firewood collection, leaving old or dead trees standing and ensuring appropriate fire management
- Protect habitat by controlling weeds and preventing removal of vegetation and spread of diseases such as Phytophthora dieback
- Revegetate around known feeding and nesting habitat with appropriate local species
- Help control competitive species such as galahs and feral honeybees that compete with the cockatoos for the same nesting hollows by reporting sightings to the local Government department