

Corellas and Other Flocking Cockatoos

Identification, Distribution and Behaviour

There are a variety of corellas and other flocking cockatoos that are native to Australia, but not all of these naturally occur in Western Australia. The western corella *Cacatua pastinator* is one of the species endemic to WA, and is made up of two subspecies: Muir's corella *Cacatua pastinator pastinator* and Butler's corella *Cacatua pastinator butleri*. Muir's corella was once widely distributed across WA but is now confined to small areas around Bridgetown and Manjimup. Butler's corella occur in the northern Wheatbelt and their range has expanded considerably since the establishment of crops and farm dams in this region. Two subspecies of the little corella, *Cacatua sanguinea westralensis* and *Cacatua sanguinea sanguinea*, naturally occur in the Pilbara and Kimberley regions of WA. Refer to www.naturemap.dpaw.wa.gov.au to find further information on the species distribution.

Several cockatoo species that are native to Australia, including the eastern long-billed corella *Cacatua tenuirostris* and eastern subspecies of the little corella *Cacatua sanguinea*, have become established in WA, despite not naturally occurring in the state. They have expanded their range through much of the Perth metropolitan area and regional towns in the past 20 years. A field guide for Australian birds can be used to differentiate between the different species of corellas and flocking cockatoos.

Corellas and other flocking cockatoos opportunistically search for food resources, feeding on grass seeds and bulbs in paddocks and other grass areas in the spring, wheat stubble remaining after harvest in the summer, and grain from stock feed troughs, animal dung and hay bales in the late summer and autumn. They roost at night in trees in large flocks. During breeding season, pairs nest in tree hollows, laying 2-3 (occasionally 4) eggs from July to October. Parents share the incubation duties and care of the young while the nestling remains in the hollow for approximately 7 weeks. After fledging, young birds and their parents join a large nomadic foraging flock.

The information provided does not apply to the three threatened black cockatoo species. Further information on these species is available on the species webpage and information sheets on the Department's website.

Environmental Law

All fauna native to Australia are afforded protection under both State and Commonwealth legislation. Muir's corella *Cacatua pastinator pastinator* is listed as fauna that is Conservation Dependent (Specially Protected) under Western Australian legislation.

Depending on the type of fauna-related activity, a licence issued by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions may be required. It is an offence to intentionally or recklessly kill, injure, trade, keep or move them unless authorised by a permit. To obtain a licence, the applicant needs to demonstrate that all reasonable non-lethal methods have been attempted and environmental impacts have been assessed. Further information is available on the Department's [website](#).

Import Restrictions

Sulphur crested cockatoos and little corellas may only be imported into WA under permit and strict conditions. Importation is prohibited except where the bird is a family pet that has been owned for 2 years and the owner is permanently moving to the state. The owner must demonstrate that these criteria have been met via a statutory declaration. The bird may not be sold or given away once in WA, and strict keeping conditions must be adhered to.



Eastern long-billed corellas (top) and a little corella (bottom). Photos: R. Kirkby.

Impacts to Biodiversity

The biodiversity impact of introduced corellas and other flocking cockatoos in south-west WA is difficult to quantify. The damage they cause to trees is a long term issue, particularly for trees that are potential nest sites for other species including the three Threatened black cockatoo species. They are also significant competitors for nesting hollows with black cockatoo species and other native hollow nesters (parrots, owls, raptors and some duck species). Corella species have also been recorded hybridising in the wild and this loss of genetic purity between the species and subspecies is considered a threatening process to WA's endemic native corellas and cockatoos.

Corella-Human Interactions

Large flocks of corellas and other cockatoos make a large amount of noise when attracted to feeding sites and congregating at roost sites, and droppings can foul trees, washing on clothes lines, buildings, recreational areas and vehicles. Flocks can also cause damage to the grass surfaces of sport fields and golf courses when they are digging for corms, bulbs and roots. Natural branch trimming behaviour while roosting can affect the health of trees when the behaviour is repeated in the same trees over time, and can lead to an increase in park and street maintenance costs. Corellas will also use artificial structures, such as telecommunication towers, as temporary roost sites and will often damage the cabling and other fixings while chewing to maintain their bills. The additional repair costs can be high for the communication operators, and ultimately the customers using those services. Corellas and other flocking cockatoos can also cause damage to homes when chewing on light fittings, aerials and roofing materials. Some of these nuisance problems originate from people deliberately feeding the birds. This is strongly discouraged. There is additional information about the negative impacts of [feeding wild animals](#) on the Department's website.

Corellas and other flocking cockatoos can also be a nuisance in agricultural areas, as they will dig up newly planted seeds of wheat and oats and feed on grain supplied for stock during the summer and autumn periods. Growers should be prepared for peak periods of activity, and should aim to address the problem before the corellas develop a habit of feeding on the crop. Corellas have also been recorded pulling up or cutting down the seedlings of blue gums, lettuce, cabbage and other root vegetable crops. They can also damage reticulation systems used for intensive horticulture. However, it should not be assumed that crops have been damaged just because birds are present. Crops should be checked for visible signs of damage, and they should be monitored throughout the region.

If you find a sick or injured corella or cockatoo contact the [Wildcare Helpline](#) on (08) 9474 9055 for information on registered wildlife rehabilitators.

Disease Risk

Like other wildlife, corellas and other flocking cockatoos can carry bacteria and viruses. Psittacosis and Chlamydia are diseases that are common in parrots and can be passed onto human through bites, scratches, contact with faeces and inhalation of feather dust. The risk of infection can be managed by following proper handling procedures, which includes wearing appropriate personal protective equipment.

Damage Prevention and Control

The key to minimising damage by corellas and other flocking cockatoos is to understand their behaviour patterns. Flocks will use regular flight paths and roost sites and will repeatedly return to favourable feeding sites. They will also opportunistically join other flocks that they see feeding. Effective damage control programs are well planned, based on an understanding of the behaviour of the birds, varied frequently, integrated with a number of different methods and persistent.

Fertility control and the use of poisons or anaesthetics are considered ineffective, impractical and inhumane methods of damage control, and the use of these methods can also present a significant risk to non-target animals. The most effective damage control methods involve limiting access to food, scaring techniques and, in some cases, population control by shooting or trapping. Ideally, one or more control measures should be undertaken before a flock becomes established in an area. The effectiveness of measures can decrease over time, as cockatoos have been known to habituate to many strategies that are employed consistently.

Limiting Access

Visual screens can be used to protect and hide newly planted seedlings, materials, small playing fields, fruit and nut orchards, vegetable crops, feed and water troughs, hay stacks and silage covers. Corellas like to have a clear view

when they are feeding, so visual screens can also make a feeding location unattractive to them.

- For newly planted seedlings, erect a screen 0.6-1m high. The screen can be a fence lined with hessian or shade cloth, or rows of native vegetation and/or tall grass. Direct seeding may also reduce the risk of plants being uprooted by the birds.
- Cover materials, such as timber, with metal or shade cloth.
- For small playing fields, such as bowling greens, erect a 2.5m high removable screen made of shade cloth or hessian.
- For orchards and crops, erect a 2.5m high visual screen of shade cloth around the crops. Netting the orchard or crops to exclude the birds may also be cost effective, particularly in areas adjacent roost sites.
- For food and water troughs, place a hood over the trough or erect shade cloth screen on three sides and above the trough.
- For hay bales and stacks, erect 2.5m high walls of shade cloth around the hay. Chicken wire can also inhibit corellas from attacking any but the outermost bales of a haystack.
- For silage covers, erect 2.5m high shade cloth or hessian walls to prevent cockatoos from perching and perforating the covers with their powerful bills.

Minimising the amount of food available in agricultural areas will help to decrease the overall corella population size, as their survival rates are linked to food availability. It is important for all farmers in an area to sow at the recommended rate, cover all grain and clean up spills, minimise residual grain in stubble, and direct drill and sow at the same time as neighbours. Locating crops away from watering points and roosting trees may also reduce the impacts of birds. Feed trails for stock should be placed out late in the day when cockatoos are returning to the roosts to allow the stock to feed through the night undisturbed. The aim should be to release just enough grain so that little residue remains in the morning. Young cockatoos are attracted to the undigested grain in cattle droppings, so regularly clear up droppings in feed lots. Removing particular plants that corellas like to feed on, such as onion grass, from agricultural areas, playing fields and other recreational areas will also make a site less attractive to the corellas.

In areas where buildings and fixtures are prone to damage by cockatoos, prudent design and material selection can prevent damage. Using hardwood or metal fixings instead of timber and replacing loose roofing nail with roofing screws will prevent damage by cockatoos. In extreme circumstances, power lines can be laid underground to prevent damage to cabling. Installing commercial wires and spikes and encasing light fittings, cables and aerials with a rotating PVC or poly-pipe can be a useful tool for preventing birds from perching and damaging homes.

Scaring Techniques

Effective scaring and decoy campaigns aimed at disturbing a cockatoo roost can often move the problem onto a neighbour who has not been employing the same level of control measures. Therefore, it is important that control programs are implemented community-wide to adequately address the problem on a larger and long-term scale. Switching between different scaring methods, and changing how the method is employed, will reduce the likelihood of the birds becoming accustomed to the techniques.

A combination of pyrotechnic cartridges and taped alarm calls, with spotlights at night roosts, is the most effective method from deterring birds from roosts. It may take a week or more for this control program to move the flock to another roost. This method requires public notification and careful management in rural towns and urban areas, as this level of noise may disturb in more heavily populated areas.

Manual scaring techniques like pyrotechnic cartridges can be expensive and time consuming, often required a farmer growing a rotation of summer and winter crops to devote 4-6 hours a day over 6-8 weeks. An alternative that is commonly used to scare flocks of birds is gas guns. They should be set to operate at long intervals, and only used when the birds are feeding on the crop early and late in the day. Gas guns are most effective if hidden by hides and should be moved every two or three days. They should also be moved out of sight when not in use.

Corellas and cockatoos are scared by birds of prey. Kites that simulate birds of prey may be effective for small paddocks but they should be shifted often.

Some potential exists to lure a flock of birds away from high value crops by supplying abundant food in an alternative location. Some farmers plough an area to expose onion grass corms to lure birds to an alternative site while sowing.

The lure should be placed at least 500m away so that scaring techniques being employed at the crop site does not

disturb the birds at the decoy site. The most effective decoy sites are those under flight paths and near trees that can be used for perching or roosting.

Population Control

Population control using lethal methods should be viewed as a last resort after all other control options have been attempted. Guidelines for approved control techniques for introduced corellas can be obtained from Parks and Wildlife upon request.

The Department has previously trialled programs to control introduced corellas in the Perth metropolitan area, and trapping has proved to be the most effective means of removing over-abundant birds and breaking up large flocks habitually feeding in an area. Trapping program rely on understanding the daily and seasonal movements of the flocks, including knowledge of feeding habits, the number of flocks, flock structure, the presence of non-target species, roosting locations and flight paths. Such information must be determined prior to undertaking a trapping program.

Most of the introduced corella species prevalent in the Perth area usually feed in the open in public space, so trapping using walk-in cage traps will have limited use and may be difficult to manage due to interference from vandals or other members of the public. For these reasons, trapping is best applied using nets at a control site that does not have public access. Trapping must only be undertaken by fully trained and qualified personnel, and must be conducted under the conditions of a licence obtained from the Department.

It can be difficult to manage the efficient, humane and safe disposal of trapped birds, so trapping activities must be controlled through the use of specific and clear operating protocols and management procedures. Any non-target species that are trapped must be release unharmed as soon as possible, and birds must not be excessively distressed or injured in the process of trapping. Any suffering must be alleviated as quickly as possible. Frightened corellas will injure themselves and other birds, so they must be euthanased as quickly and humanely as possible after trapping.

When using a trap, shooting using a low powered licenced firearm is the most practical, quick and effective means to humanely euthanase an animal. Local police in the relevant area should be informed in advance and written permission must be obtained from the owner or occupier of the property prior to any control actions being undertaken. The reaction of members of the public should also be considered when selecting a trapping site and undertaking trapping and euthanasia methods.

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