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Black cockatoos



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There are five species of black cockatoos in Australia – red-tailed, glossy, yellow-tailed, Carnaby's and Baudin's black cockatoo.

Cockatoos are similar to parrots in many ways including having a curved beak and what's known as a zygodactyl foot, which means two toes face forward and two face backwards. However, cockatoos do have unique features that parrots don't have such as a gall bladder and a moveable crest on top of their heads. Cockatoos are larger than parrots and can never be green or blue in colour as they lack a special feather composition giving parrots the ability to be blue or green.

Cockatoos occur naturally only in Australia and on some nearby islands. Black cockatoos are endemic to Australia, therefore found nowhere else in the world.



Did you know?

- Cockatoos, like all birds, have many bones that are hollow. This makes them very light weight, which helps them fly.
- Cockatoos are long-lived birds and can live to be more than 50 years old.
- The name cockatoo originated from the Malay name for these birds, kaka(k)tua.

Distribution and habitat

The distribution of the five species of black cockatoo is varied due to differences in their habitat preferences.

There are five sub-species of red-tailed black cockatoo, which can be found in south-west Western Australia, central Australia, Northern Territory and Queensland as well as the south-east of Victoria and south-west South Australia. Red-tailed black cockatoos live in a variety of habitat types from shrubland, woodlands and tropical rainforest.

The two species of white-tailed black-cockatoos, Carnaby's and Baudin's, are both found in south-west Australia. They rely on heavily forested areas, woodlands and heathland. Carnaby's black-cockatoo has adapted to also rely on pine plantations as a food source.

The yellow-tailed black cockatoo is found in south-eastern Australia, from the Eyre Peninsula in South Australia to southern and central parts of eastern Queensland. They rely on a variety of habitat types from eucalypt woodlands to pine plantations.

The glossy black cockatoo has three sub-species that can be found in south-east Australia, central -astern Queensland and South Australia's Kangaroo Island. They live in casuarina woodland and rely on eucalypt trees for nesting.

Ecology and life cycle

All species of black cockatoo have similar ecology and life cycles only varying slightly depending on their habitat and food requirements. They have, however, evolved slightly different beak shapes, which is an adaptaion to their feeding habitat. Baudin's black cockatoo has a very thin long beak, which is used to extract seeds out of gum nuts, whereas the Carnaby's black-cockatoo has a thick, strong short beak for breaking open banksia nuts.

Black cockatoos nest in deep hollows of large ancient trees, which may be more than 200 years old. Usually a single egg is incubated by the female, with the chick taking around three months to make its first flight. Nestlings are fed only by the female, who relies on the male to bring food while the chick is very young. Each black cockatoo species nests at slightly different times of the year, for example glossy black cockatoos on Kangaroo Island nest in summer and autumn whereas Carnaby's black cockatoos nest in winter and spring.

Black cockatoos in the wild can live for 25 to 50 years but captive cockatoos have been known to live into their 70s.

Threats

Four of the five species of black cockatoo are listed by the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* (1999) as threatened - south-eastern red-tail, Baudin's, Carnaby's and Kangaroo Island glossy black cockatoo. The

threats to them vary but most species have been affected by habitat loss.

Habitat loss

The main reason for the loss of habitat is predominately land clearing for agriculture. Baudin's black cockatoo has been affected by the loss of old growth forest, which has been logged for use in the timber trade. This loss of habitat not only affects nesting hollow availability but also food availability and in some cases, such as for Carnaby's black cockatoo and red-tailed black cockatoo, loss of food availability is a major contributor to the decline of population numbers.

Predators

For the Kangaroo Island glossy black cockatoo, predation by the common brushtail possum is also a threat.

Conservation action

WWF-Australia has been involved with a number of initiatives to aid in the recovery of Australia's threatened black cockatoos.

In Western Australia, 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. Main activities include protecting, connecting and enhancing breeding and feeding habitat (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, monitoring breeding activity, and advocating for protection of critical habitat both in their wheatbelt breeding sites and foraging sites on the Swan Coastal Plain.

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*
- 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

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