

Conservation of Black Cockatoos

By Sebastian Rapanaro

I live on a small farm in Karnup, south of Perth. We have Forest Red-Tailed, Baudin's and Carnaby's Black Cockatoos who regularly visit. We have many other species as well, including: Laughing Kookaburras, Ringneck Parrots, Grey Fantails, Splendid Fairy Wrens, Scarlet Robins, New Holland Honeyeaters, Pacific Black Ducks, and the occasional Wedge-Tailed Eagle, Western Rosella and Red-capped Parrot, just to name a few.

I am very passionate about supporting the Forest Red-tailed and Carnaby's Black Cockatoos, which are classed as *endangered* and *vulnerable*.

The first thing I ever did related to the Black Cockatoos was to participate in the Great Cockey Count in 2014. This made me aware of their plight and in the same year, I decided to host a 'science day' about the Black cockatoos with all my friends. We had Mr. Hugh Finn from Birdlife come over, Kaarakin with Chasey and Rex (Carnaby's and Baudin's Black Cockatoos), and of course, Mr Francis Smit from Landcare.



After the science day, Landcare assisted us in putting a 'Cockatube' nesting box that we purchased, up in a very large tree on our property. Everyone at the science day had participated in its construction and signed it. We are lucky that we also have trees old enough to provide natural hollows usable for the cockatoos on our farm. Black Cockatoos require nests in large hollows from trees at least 120 years old. We put the 'Cockatube' up to give the birds the best possible chance of breeding.

Black Cockatoos live up to 50 years but don't breed until they are 7-8 years of age, and usually only one chick survives into adulthood. So, you could say they are slow breeders. Due to deforestation, they have lost many trees with suitable hollows. Sometimes they are driven out of their nesting hollows by other more aggressive parrots like Galahs and

Corellas, as well as introduced honey bees. It would be invaluable for people to put up nesting boxes for the black cockatoos, as they need the 'real-estate'.

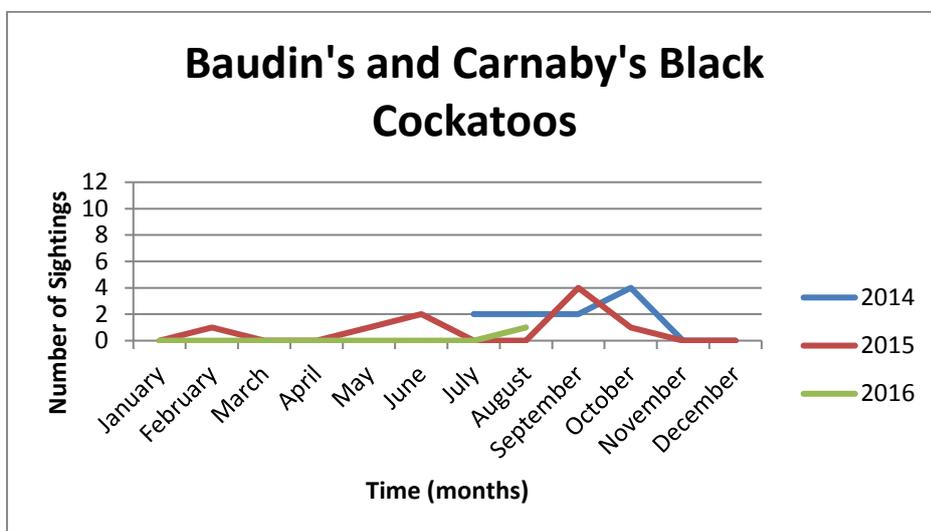
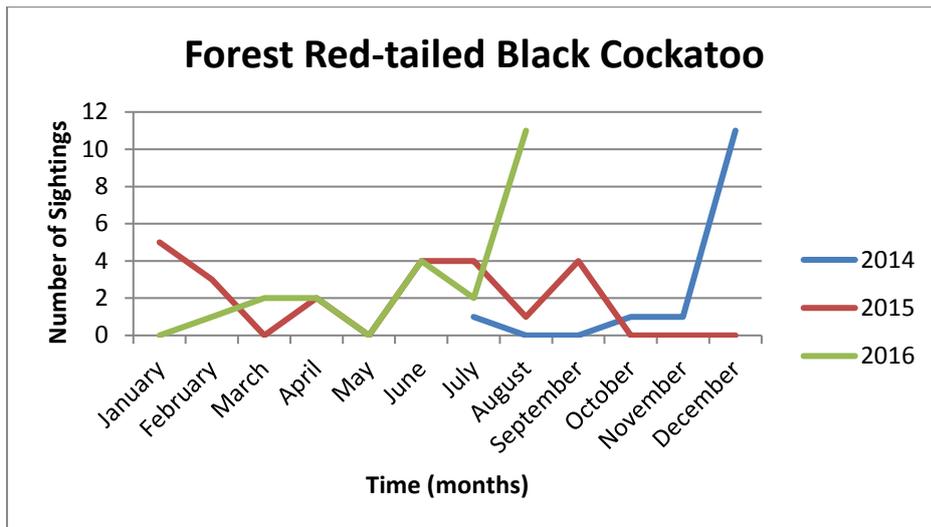
We have a pair of Red-tails that have been coming since last year. The female (pictured below in the hollow) bred in a natural hollow on our property. The hollow is a least five metres above the ground. Its diameter is unknown but it appears to be a bit over a metre in depth.



Recently, she had a fledgling who I think is a boy (pictured centre) with regular flyovers from the male (right). I managed to take some great photos of the baby and the father regurgitating food to feed it. This told me that it was a fledgling, as it was still reliant on its parents for food. They seem to have created a small group with another family who visit regularly.



I regularly take photos of the Cockatoos, and have been keeping a log of the sightings for 3 years. So far, the data has revealed the Red-tails as the main Black cockatoo in the area. However, we still get a few visits from Carnaby's and Baudin's, which have been coming more regularly in recent times.



Early on, I saw more Baudin's and Carnaby's Cockatoos. However, as we went into late 2014 and early 2015, we saw an increase in the number of Forest Red-Tailed Cockatoo. By 2016, we saw not much else. The Baudin's and Carnaby's really declined after October 2015 and in 2016 they returned in moderate numbers, and the Red-Tails seem to have taken residence at Bella Terra. We were away for six weeks in September and part of October 2016, which is why there are no recorded sightings for that period .

I don't record flyovers, as they aren't truly visiting our property, but they happen quite often. I have witnessed many flyovers of Red-tails, Baudin's and Carnaby's cockatoos.

Based on my three years of observation, I saw more Carnaby's in late winter to mid-spring with fewer sightings during autumn. I saw more Red-tails during winter and summer, with slightly fewer sightings during late summer to autumn.

I will continue recording as often as I can in the future. I am interested in seeing whether this pattern continues.

Not everyone is able to put up a Cockatube on their property. However, people can plant cockatoo-friendly plants in their gardens. We have also built a bird-friendly garden for all the birds that visit our property. Some of the plants are suitable for cockatoos, including Grevilleas and Honey bushes. Cockatoos also love Banksias, Marri and Jarrah nuts. Luckily we have these naturally in our area, providing an invaluable food source. If councils and home owners could plant these types of plants, it would help feed the declining Black Cockatoo population.

People can also volunteer at Kaarakin (the Black Cockatoo rehab centre). I have recently begun volunteering there myself. I have also donated macadamia and marri nuts along with some towels for the vet clinic. Macadamias have as much nutritional value as 30 marri nuts. Let's hope the Black Cockatoos go 'nuts' for our 'Maccas'!

I feel very lucky to have so many birds on my property including the wonderful Black Cockatoos, as well helping to support their species. I hope to increase awareness of their plight and encourage other people to get involved in helping them. Thanks for reading.