

Australian Cockatoos

by Stan Sindel
Sydney, Australia

Editor's Note: Stan Sindel is a noted and well-respected aviculturist from Sydney, Australia. He presented two papers at the 1985 national AFA convention in San Francisco, California, one of which was Australian Cockatoos. This article deals with the Australian cockatoos found in their natural habitat and in Australian aviculture. Mr. Sindel is the author of the book, "Australian Lorikeets."

We have eleven species and many subspecies of cockatoos in Australia.

Two of these subspecies are quite distinct. For avicultural purposes, I shall deal with them as separate species; they are the White-tailed Black Cockatoo and the Western Long-billed Corella.

When one considers there are only 18 species of cockatoos in the world, it is clear that the Australian cockatoo family is very well represented. One or more species of cockatoo may be seen in every form of habitat found over the entire continent.

The Palm Cockatoo, Gang Gang and Galah are monotypic; that is, they are the only member of their genus. The cockatiel is the only member of its entire sub-family (*Calopsittacini*).

Some of the species, such as Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, Galahs and Short-billed Corellas, now exist in almost plague proportions particularly in some of the farming areas. The clearing of land for grazing and the development of permanent water for stock purposes, particularly in the more arid areas, has helped these three species to extend their range



The Slender-billed Cockatoo's elongated upper mandible is used to dig in the ground for roots and bulbs. They also dig up newly planted grain and it is for this reason they are considered an agricultural pest and are often destroyed.



The female Red-tailed Black Cockatoo has a yellow spotting or barring on its head and upper body in comparison to the solid dark male.

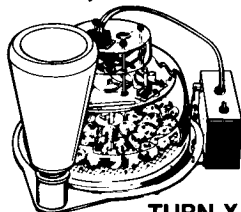


Gang-gang cockatoos are often found in high, rugged mountainous areas of southeastern Australia and Tasmania. Only the male has a red head.

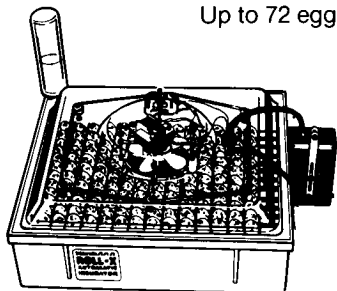
Photos by George D. Dodge and Dale R. Thompson

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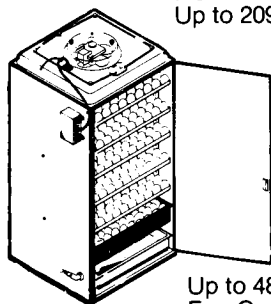
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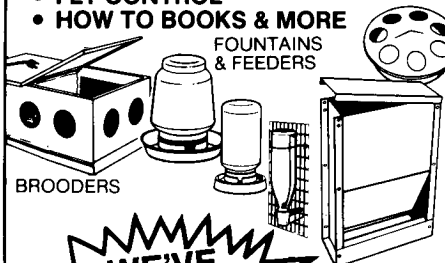
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and expand their numbers. The population explosions that have resulted put these birds in jeopardy. The birds now suffer from massive extermination efforts in the farming districts.

All species are still surviving well in the wild with the exception of the Major Mitchell Cockatoo. That species still exists in reasonable numbers. The species is suffering from the side effects of poisoning and general persecution by the farmers. While the farmers' depopulation efforts are directed at the Sulphur-crested Cockatoos and the Galahs that inhabit the same areas, the Major Mitchell species suffers as well. The Long-billed Corella is also in a vulnerable position. The vulnerability is due to the species' limited range, which extends into the grain growing areas. The numbers of Long-billed Corellas are high, but constant persecution due to its habit of damaging crops, places the species at great risk.

I have been fortunate enough to have observed all species and most subspecies in the wild. Even so, as a native Australian, I am still thrilled by the sight of black cockatoos, Major Mitchell Cockatoos and Gang Gangs in their natural habitat.

Over the last 20 years, I have bred all the non-black species of Australian cockatoos, with the exception of the Sulphur-crested Cockatoo. I have never kept the Palm or the black cockatoos. All the avicultural information on the black cockatoos is given by Mr. Bob Lynn of Sydney, Australia. I consider Mr. Lynn to be the greatest aviculturist in Australia today. He keeps only black cockatoos, and in specializing in this family I believe he chose one of the most difficult of avicultural subjects.

He has bred all species including the Palm Cockatoo and the Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo for the first time in aviculture, in the world. Australian aviculturists do not consider a hand-reared bird to be a first breeding. To achieve a first breeding award, the youngster must be reared to independence by the parents.

Diets

Cockatoos represent such a diverse family that diets must, of necessity, vary considerably. In general, a basic mixed seed diet of sunflower, canary, maize, sorghum, safflower, wheat and millet may be fed to all species, with the exception of the Galah. The Galah is very subject to obesity. I feed those birds only the basic diet of white mil-

let and sorghum, and even these seeds should be fed in limited quantities.

All cockatoos enjoy, and should be given, sprouted seeds (particularly sunflower and maize), sweet corn, wholemeal bread, raw peanuts, various fruits and vegetables, a variety of green foods, table scrap bones such as chop bones, chicken bones, and the like. One can add, on occasion, a little raw meat (particularly for Gang Gangs and black cockatoos), plain cake, biscuits and dog kibble.

Bob Lynn attributes some of his success with the black cockatoos to feeding them Casurina cones. He also feeds his black cockatoos Banksia, Hakea and pine cones.

Bob Lynn and I have both found that baby cockatoos being reared by the parents often suffer from calcium deficiencies. We have overcome such deficiencies by feeding a calcium supplement on the sprouted seeds.

Feeding a good balanced diet to cockatoos is one thing, getting them to eat that balanced diet is another. Perseverance and cunning is needed to get some individual birds to eat what you know they should eat. Bob Lynn dusts all his sunflower seeds with a mineral and vitamin supplement and he feels this is having a desired effect.

When hand rearing cockatoos, I feed a mixture of two parts "Farex" baby food, one part chicken starter pellets and one part egg and biscuit canary rearing food, together with calcium, mineral and vitamin supplements.

Housing

In Australia, as everywhere else in the world, aviaries vary considerably. I believe that a minimum aviary size for the smaller cockatoos should be 15 feet long, 3 feet wide, and 7 feet high. For the black cockatoos a minimum of 24 feet long, 4 feet wide and 8 feet high is required. I have bred Major Mitchell's Cockatoos and Short-billed Corellas in an aviary 6 feet long, 3 feet wide and 5 feet high. Under such conditions, the lack of exercise will eventually promote egg binding in the hens.

My cockatoo aviaries have a 6 foot shelter on one end and a 6 foot roofed area on the other. I provide only two perches, one at each end of the aviary. This forces the birds to fly the maximum length of the aviary. I prefer solid walled partitions. Use of such partitions eliminates disturbance caused by neighbors and injuries

from birds fighting through wire partitions.

Bob Lynn provides large aviaries for his black cockatoos. Some are as much as 40 feet long, 15 feet wide and 10 feet high. All of his aviaries are well sheltered, particularly from prevailing winds. Some of the aviaries are fully roofed.

Suspended cages are also in use in Australia, for housing cockatoos. It is too early to ascertain just how successful such cages will be for our cockatoos, under Australian conditions.

Palm Cockatoo (*Probosciger aterimus*)

Sexes alike, but the male is larger. Length is 23-1/2 inches.

Range: These birds are found in the top part of the Cape York Peninsula. The Palm Cockatoo is contained in its present limited northern range by a belt of arid country which prevents the species from reaching more suitable habitat further south. I have found the species to be reasonably plentiful within its range. I feel the survival of the species is assured, providing the habitat remains untouched.

The Palms feed on native nuts, seeds and fruit, and seem to prefer the nuts of the Pandanus palm.

The Palm Cockatoo has seldom been bred in captivity. The future of the species in aviculture is in the hands of aviculturists outside Australia. There are a few of these birds in Australian aviaries. The few now in aviculture are mainly very old birds. Unless the wildlife authorities allow more of the species to be taken into captivity, there can be no future for them in Australian aviculture.

The hen Palm Cockatoo lays one egg, which is incubated by both the male and the female. The incubation period is approximately 34 days. The young remain in the nest for approximately 12 weeks. This cockatoo has the unusual habit of building a nest platform of sticks and twigs, picked up and chewed for such use.

Bob Lynn has bred the Palm Cockatoo on three occasions. The birds nested in a log with a natural spout inlet, which stood five feet high, had an internal diameter of two feet and was filled to within one and one-half feet of the entrance with chewed sticks, put there by both the male and female. I saw a first chick just a few days after it left the nest. It was a magnificent youngster, four inches longer

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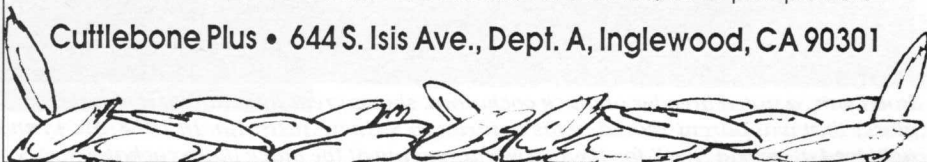
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Casuarina cones are commonly eaten by glossy cockatoos in the wild, and are often fed to them while in captivity. Some aviculturists believe this cone is essential to the bird's well being.



Adult female White-tailed Black Cockatoo on nest. Two eggs are normally laid but usually only one chick is reared in the wild.



Bob Lynn, a noted breeder of black cockatoos, shows great affection to a female glossy that was parent-reared in his aviaries in Sydney, Australia. In 1968, Mr. Lynn achieved a "world first" for the successful rearing of the black palm cockatoo.

than its father, even at that early age.

Palm Cockatoos are not dependent on a supply of native food to ensure production of strong, healthy young. Bob found when rearing young, the birds actually preferred a domesticated diet consisting of various nuts and seeds.

Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus funereus funereus*)

The sexes differ in this species. The male has a black beak, pink eye ring and a dull yellow cheek patch. The female has a horn colored beak, dark grey eye ring and a bright yellow cheek patch. Length is 24 inches.

Range: They are found in eastern and southeastern Australian and Tasmania.

There are two subspecies, *Calyptorhynchus funereus funereus* from the northern and eastern parts of the range, and *Calyptorhynchus funereus xanthanotus* from Tasmania and the extreme southern section of the mainland range.

The Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo is in good numbers throughout its range. I frequently see small flocks, or a family party (consisting of an adult pair and the previous season youngster), whenever I spend time in the mountains west of Sydney. The birds have a large range through mountainous and heavily forested country, which I feel ensures their survival.

They feed on seeds from Eucalyptus, Hakea, Acacia and Banksia. They have also adapted to and feed on seeds from the introduced pines. This species is also very fond of the larvae of various moths and beetles.

The Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo was first bred in captivity by Bob Lynn in 1963. In more recent years, it has been bred by several other aviculturists in Australia.

The hen of the species lays two eggs. The incubation period is about 30 days and is carried out by the female only. The last chick to hatch is almost always allowed to die within the first few days. The young spend approximately 12 weeks in the nest.

White-tailed Black Cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus funereus baudinii*)

The sexes differ in this species. The male has a black beak, pink eye ring and a dull white cheek patch. The female has a horn colored beak, dark grey eye ring and a bright white cheek patch. Length is about 25 inches.

Range: They are found in southwestern Australia.

There are two subspecies, *Calypt-*



Photo by George D. Dodge and Dale R. Thompson

A mutation occurring in the Rose-breasted (or Galah) Cockatoo is a dark-eyed white. The normal grey color is replaced with white. These birds were photographed in Stan Sindel's aviary.

torhynchus funereus baudinii, from the extreme southwest of the range, and *Calyptorhynchus funereus latirostris*, from the rest of the range.

The White-tailed Black Cockatoo is still in good numbers throughout its range. When in western Australia, I had no trouble seeing both subspecies in the wild.

They feed on native seeds such as *Dryandra*, *Hakea*, *Erodium*, intro-

duced pines and insect larvae.

This species has been bred several times in captivity. Bob Lynn bred it first in the early seventies. The hen lays two eggs. The incubation period is approximately 30 days, and is carried out by the female only. It appears, as in the case of the Yellow-tailed, that invariably only one chick

is reared, and it spends about 12 weeks in the nest.

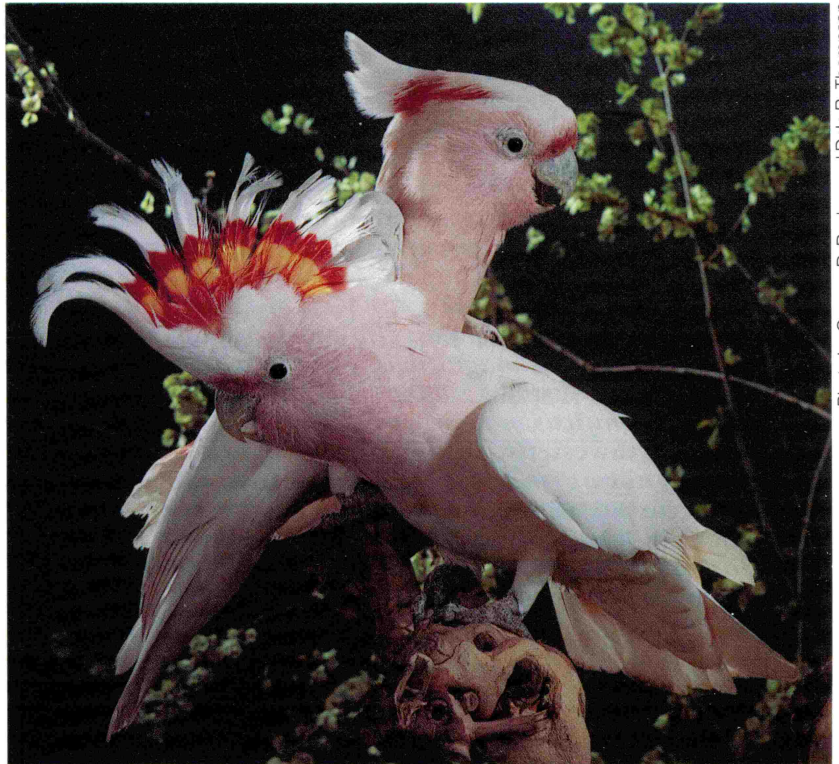
Red-tailed Black Cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus magnificus*)

Sexes differ in this species. The male has a general blackish appearance with broad red bars in the tail and a blackish beak. The female is

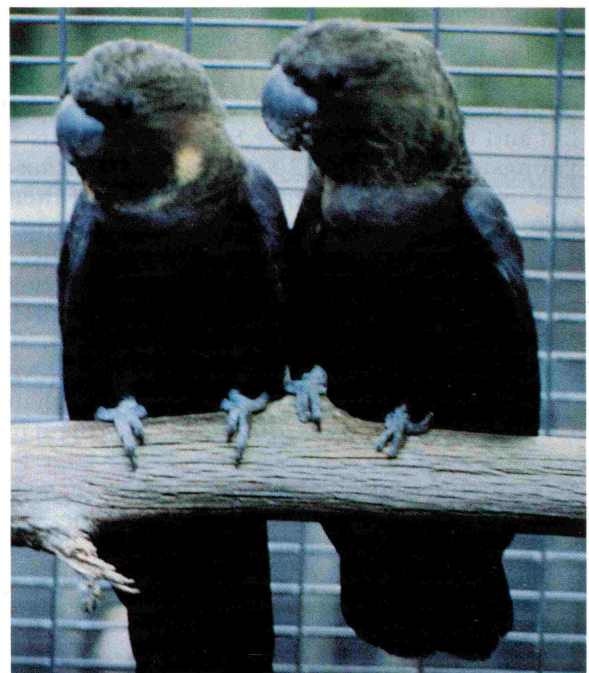


Photo by Bill Wegner

White-tailed Black Cockatoo babies at 4 and 25 days of age. Note long, fuzzy feathers at a very early age which disappear when black feathers emerge.



The Leadbeater's (or Major Mitchell's) Cockatoo is a very popular Australian cockatoo with American aviculturists.



The female glossy cockatoo can be identified by the yellow feathering found throughout the neck and head areas. It also has a yellow or orange wash in its tail barring.

Photo by George D. Dodge and Dale R. Thompson

Photo by George D. Dodge and Dale R. Thompson

generally browner with yellow spotting and barring over the head and body, yellow to orange barring in the tail, and a horn colored beak. Length is 23 to 27 inches, according to the race.

Range: Northern and northeastern Australia, central Australia, inland eastern Australia, and southwestern Australia, and a small isolated population in southern Australia.

There are four subspecies, *Calyptrorhynchus magnificus magnificus* from northeastern Australia, *Calyptrorhynchus magnificus macrorhynchus* from northwestern Australia, *Calyptrorhynchus magnificus samueli* occurring in four isolated populations in inland Australia, and *Calyptrorhynchus magnificus naso* from southwestern Australia.

All species are in good numbers in the wild. I recently saw a flock of over 1,000 birds of *magnificus* on Cape York Peninsula. Some years ago, I observed *macrorhynchus* in large numbers in the Northern Territory, and I have seen *samueli* and *naso* in smaller flocks.

The species feeds on Eucalyptus, Acacia, Casuarina, Hakea and Banksia seeds, fruits, berries, blossoms, insects and their larvae.

These black cockatoos are the most commonly kept and bred in Australia. It is hardier and more adaptable than any of the other species. Many aviculturists maintain and breed these black cockatoos on a totally domesticated diet without the addition of native foods.

Bob Lynn has bred the species many times. He has one pair that go to nest every seven months without fail and this pair has reared over 30 youngsters in the last 20 years. The hen usually lays one egg, sometimes two, and the incubation period is about 30 days. Brooding is carried out by the female only. The babies leave the nest after 12 weeks. Usually only one baby is reared.

Glossy Black Cockatoo

(*Calayptorhynchus lathami*)

The sexes differ in this species. The males are often brownish black with broad red tail bars and a dark grey beak. The female has a yellow to orange wash in the tail barring, and the variable yellow feathering throughout the neck and head areas present a light grey look. Length is 20 inches.

Range: Eastern Australia.

There are no subspecies.

The Glossy Black Cockatoos are doing well in the wild. They are usually seen in pairs or in a family group. I have often seen them feeding on Casuarina cones in national parks on the outskirts of Sydney.

Their diet appears to be basically the seed from Casuarinas, but seed from Angophora, Acacia, Eucalyptus and insect larvae are also eaten.

This species is now more commonly kept in Australian aviaries and has been bred by several aviculturists in the last few years. Bob Lynn bred them first in the early seventies. He still believes a constant supply of Casuarina cones is essential for their successful maintenance in captivity. His results substantiate this belief, although some aviculturists are now keeping the birds on a totally domesticated diet.

The hen lays one egg. The incubation period is about 30 days and is carried out by the female only. The young spend 12 weeks in the nest.

Gang Gang Cockatoo

(*Callocephalon fimbriatum*)

The sexes differ in this species. The male has a red head and the female has orange barring on the chest and belly. Young birds are similar to the female, but the male can be distinguished by some red feathering on the head. Length is 14 inches.

Range: Southeastern Australia and northern Tasmania.

This is a monotypic genus which I feel resembles the black cockatoos in general habits and feeding patterns.

They are still doing well in the wild but do suffer at the hands of illegal trappers. A successful future for these birds is, I believe, assured if only because of the rugged nature of most of their habitat and the habit of nesting in high trees in deep mountain gullies.

The Gang Gangs are very nomadic in their movements but are usually seen in certain areas at the same time each year. Gang Gangs are my favorite cockatoo and although I have seen them many times in the wild, often in large flocks, I find it hard to describe the feeling this species transmits to me.

These birds feed on the seeds of native trees and shrubs. The birds particularly like Eucalyptus and Acacia. They also like the seeds of many introduced shrubs such as Pyracantha and Crataegus. They also eat berries, nuts, insects and larvae.

The species is widely held in aviar-

ies and is bred many times each season. I find a compatible pair is essential. My best pair of Gang Gangs use a vertical log 2 feet long and 12 inches internal diameter, with an entrance hole near the top. The hen lays two eggs, and very occasionally three. The incubation period is 24 days and is shared by both parents. The young remain in the nest about seven weeks.

Feather plucking is a serious problem with captive Gang Gangs. I do not believe this is a dietary condition, but more of a psychological problem. I find plucking seldom occurs in compatible pairs and I believe the condition is often brought on by boredom. A cinnamon mutation of the Gang Gang has been recorded.

Galah

(*Eolophus roseicapillus*)

Sexes differ with the male having a dark brown eye and the female a copperish red eye. Immatures all have light brown eyes. Length is 14 inches.

Range: Almost the entire continent, and eastern Tasmania.

There are two subspecies, *Eolophus roseicapillus roseicapillus*, which has a deep pink eye ring, found through the entire range. *Eolophus roseicapillus assimilis*, with its paler plumage and a greyish white eye ring, is found in southwestern Australia. Forshaw designates the Galah as being a monotypic genus and I agree with him.

It is by far the most successful, numerous, and prolific species of cockatoo in Australia. It is constantly extending its range. The bird exists in massive numbers in some areas. It is common in most cities and towns throughout Australia. It has extended its range from inland Australia, across the mountain onto the coastal plains around Sydney.

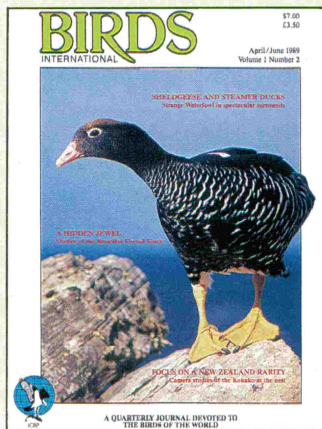
The birds eat seeds of grasses, shrubs and trees. They also eat fruit, nuts, berries, herbage, insects and, in fact, almost anything that is edible. They cause massive crop damage and are exterminated in large numbers. While they have been bred many times in captivity, they are not widely kept as an aviary bird but are common as cage birds.

The appearance of numerous mutations of Galahs has resulted in a few more being kept for avicultural purposes. I find they are subject to obesity in captivity and must be fed a limited diet.

The hen lays three to five eggs. The

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incubation period is approximately 24 days with both parents sharing incubation. The babies leave the nest in about seven weeks. The nesting chamber is lined with eucalyptus leaves.

I have recorded Galah mutations as follows: albino, red-eyed cinnamon, black-eyed cinnamon (three distinct varieties), silver (another cinnamon variety), a totally off white colored bird, black-eyed (dilute) and a variety where the pink has been replaced by off white.

Sulphur-crested Cockatoo

(*Cacatua galerita*)

The sexes are alike, but all males have a very dark brown iris, while most females, but not all, have a reddish brown iris. Length is 20 inches.

Range: Eastern and northern Australia and Tasmania. There is an isolated, introduced population in western Australia.

There are two subspecies. *Cacatua galerita galerita*, from the north-eastern and eastern part of the range; and *Cacatua galerita fitzroyi*, which has yellow suffused cheek patches and a blue eye ring, from the north-western section of the range.

This species is common in the eastern section of its range and is in plague proportions in some agricultural areas. It may be seen in most cities and towns within its range.

They feed on the seeds of grasses, herbaceous plants, shrubs and trees, nuts, fruits, blossoms and roots of both native and introduced plants, as

well as insect life.

I have never kept this species in an aviary, although we have a cage bird that has been in the family for over 55 years. Sulphur-crested Cockatoos are very common as cage birds in Australia.

The species has been bred on but a few occasions in Australia, not because it is difficult to breed but because it is so numerous.

This species lays two and occasionally three eggs. Both sexes incubate for a period of approximately 26 days. The young leave the nest at around eight weeks of age.

There is a lutino mutation of this species in Australia at the moment.

Major Mitchell's Cockatoo

(*Cacatua leadbeateri*)

Sexes differ in that the male has a dark brown eye, whereas the female has a reddish eye color. The hen also has a broader yellow band in the crest and is paler in the belly. Length is 16 inches.

Range: These birds are found in the arid and semi-arid interior of Australia, except for the northeastern quarter.

There are two subspecies, *Cacatua leadbeateri leadbeateri* from the northern and eastern parts of the range. *Cacatua leadbeateri mollis*, which has more and a deeper red and less yellow in the crest, is from the southwestern section of the range.

This species has declined in its range, probably due to land clearing for grazing purposes as it appears to be more dependent on woodlands than the other inland species of cockatoos.

I have seen this species many times in western New South Wales and southwestern Queensland. The birds are usually seen in pairs or in small flocks. Many old time residents have told me of the larger numbers that used to inhabit the same areas fifty years ago.

The diet consists of seeds, fruits, nuts, berries and roots of mainly native grasses, plants, trees and insects. I have often seen this species feeding on the seed of paddy melons, a type of melon common in inland Australia.

The Major Mitchell's Cockatoo is, without doubt, the most beautiful cockatoo in the world. It is a very popular aviary bird in Australia. I have found it to be the easiest to breed of all our cockatoos. My records show I first bred them in

1962. The pair were both hand-reared pets. They were housed in an aviary six feet long, but I do not recommend these conditions. The hen will lay three or four eggs. Both sexes incubate over a period of approximately 24 days. The young remain in the nest for eight weeks.

Short-billed Corella or Bare-eyed Cockatoo

(*Cacatua pastinator*)

Sexes are alike in this species. Length is 15 inches.

Range: Western, northern and the interior of eastern Australia.

There are three subspecies: *Cacatua pastinator gymnopsis*, from the southern sections of the range; *Cacatua pastinator sanguinea*, from the northwestern part of the range; and *Cacatua pastinator normantoni*, from the northeastern part of the range.

This species exists in large numbers in most parts of its range and it is expanding its range in many areas. I have seen this species in large flocks almost everywhere I have traveled in the Australian outback.

The diet consists of seeds, fruits, nuts, berries, blossoms, and roots of native and introduced grasses, plants, shrubs, trees and insects.

I kept a breeding pair of this species many years ago in an aviary six feet long, six feet high and three feet wide. They bred for several seasons in this aviary. That all stopped when I gave the birds to a friend. The nesting log was one and one-half feet long and 12 inches internal diameter. The log was hung vertically and it was fully open at the top. The hen usually lays three eggs. Both sexes incubate for a period of approximately 24 days. The young leave the nest at about seven weeks.

Western Long-billed Corella

(*Cacatua pastinator pastinator*)

Sexes are alike in this species. Length is 16 inches.

Range: Southwestern Australia.

The Western Long-billed Corella is classed as the nominate race of the Short-billed Corella. I believe they are quite distinct and I fail to see how two subspecies could inhabit the same area for thousands of years without becoming one.

The species formerly existed in large numbers over a wider range, but has declined dramatically over the last fifty years. More recent reports indicate their numbers are increasing

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again. When I was in western Australia about 15 years ago, they were difficult to find and I only saw odd pairs.

Diet is similar to the Short-billed Corella, with the addition of more root feeding. The elongated upper mandible is well adapted for digging.

This species has seldom been bred in captivity. The clutch is two to three eggs. Incubation period is about 24 days. The young spend seven to eight weeks in the nest.

**Long-billed Corella
or Slender-billed Corella**
(*Cacatua tenuirostris*)

Sexes are alike in this species and there is no subspecies. Length is 16 inches.

Range: A limited area of southeastern Australia.

This species exists in large numbers within its limited range. It is responsible for extensive crop damage.

An Australian bird trapper boasts of holding a permit, issued by a State Wildlife Department, to trap one million of these birds. Of course, he will not trap that many because he filled the market after trapping a few thousand. They currently retail for about \$20 each.

Considering all aspects of the Long-billed Corella's situation, I feel they are in great danger and must be watched very closely.

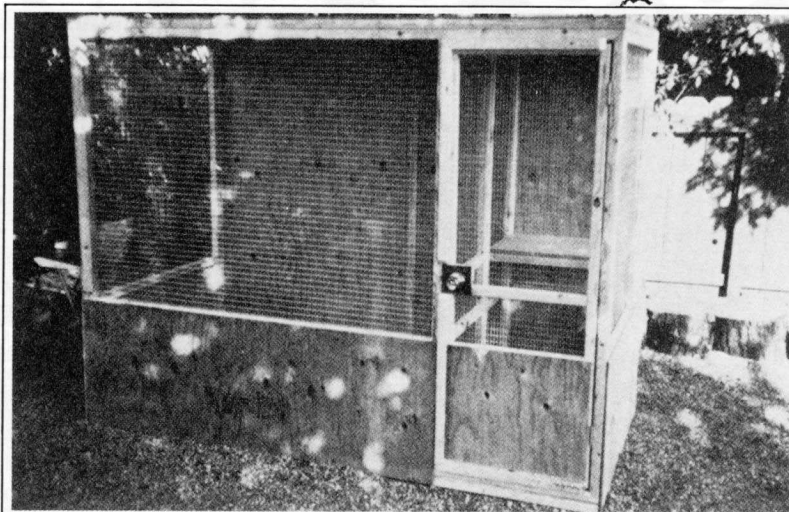
The diet is similar to the other corellas, but they are well adapted for the digging of roots and bulbs.

I kept what I thought was a pair of these birds for 15 years. They would never accept any nesting site I offered, but insisted in excavating a hole under the concrete floor of the house section of their aviary. I was almost certain they had laid on a few occasions, but could never verify this due to the length and depth of the hole. They were never successful in producing young, due to the hole caving in, rain filling it with water or some other disaster.

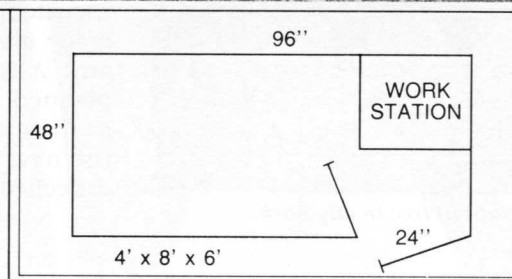
In 1983, I had the birds surgically sexed. To my surprise, they were a pair. The next season I housed them in a different aviary. It was 24 feet long, 4 feet wide and 8 feet high. There was an old nesting log 2 feet 6 inches long and 14 inches internal diameter hanging vertically in the aviary. The Long-bills immediately accepted this derelict log. In due course, two eggs were laid which were incubated by both parents. One egg was broken during incubation. The incubation period was 24 days. The baby left the nest at eight weeks. •

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