

Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo

Story and Photography by Matt Baird



The Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo would have to be the most commonly encountered/heard of all the black cockatoos along the southeastern parts of Australia and is a very common visitor within the suburbs of local major cities like Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide. With this it is no wonder that it was one of the first of the black cockatoos that found popularity.

Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus funereus*)

Calyptorhynchus

Calyptos—Greek for hidden

Rhynchus—Greek for beak

Funerues—Latin for black/funeral

Weight —(approx) 800g

Length —(approx) 650–700mm

There are two subspecies of the Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo, the largest and nominate is from Northern Victoria through New South Wales and into central Queensland.

Calyptorhynchus funereus xanthanotus is a lot smaller than its

northern cousin.

Weight—(approx) 600g

Length—(approx) 550–600mm

Population covers southern Victoria into the South Australian border and throughout Tasmania as well as a small population that exists on Kangaroo Island. There have been many sightings of *C.f. xanthanotus* in large flocks of 300-400 flying between Kangaroo Island and the mainland. It has been noticed within the species that as the bird's population travels to the west of the country, the smaller the birds become as well as variations in the feather coloration. The yellow becomes more prominent in color. Yellow-tails that are found in Tasmania are very similar to the nominate race but are a little smaller in size.

When viewing these birds in flight one often wonders how they stay in the air as their wing movements seem very slow and lazy. The Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo is more often heard by its unmistakable call before it is seen.

During the hotter months (November–February) large flocks



A rare mutation of a Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus funereus*) bred in captivity in Australia.

can be seen as they feed on the Banksia cones that are planted around local parks and gardens. Their diet consists of various fruits and seeds from a vast variety of native and introduced trees such as the acacias, eucalyptus and the introduced pine tree. They love breaking open the pinecones for the pine nut inside.

I have observed the Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo on numerous times stripping a tree trunk to find and extract wood boring larvae.

Aviculture

The first breeding of the Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo is accredited to Bob Lynn in Sydney Australia in 1965.

The Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo courtship can be heard from some distance. It begins with the hen starting to show some interest in one particular nest log around December. Typically, the size of hollow log is about four feet with a internal dimension of approx 350mm (14 in.).

Due to their desire to chew and destroy everything I give them, I prefer to use a natural hollow log over a nest box. Given the size and weight of the log, I stand them on a steel frame or drum in a vertical and well-lit position. An inspection hole is made into the side for ease of inspection; most pairs will also tolerate regular inspections. Nesting material is made up of a medium grade

pine bark to a depth of 100 mm (4 in.). To this I add some larger pieces that I find helps stimulate the birds into breeding. A heavily walled log is recommended, as the hen will chew aggressively prior to and during egg incubation.

During the courtship, the hen will rest on top of the hollow and scream their distinct whistle-like call. During this time, the cock bird will strut up and down a nearby perch with his tail fanned and crest forward. As the female screams, the male will make a sound similar to a foraging chicken. Once the noise has ceased, the male will fly over to the female and feed her.

Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos are easily sexed. Males have a pink periopythalmic eye ring, black-brown beak and dull yellow ear coverts.

Females have a dark grey periopythamic eye ring, horn colored beak and bright yellow coverts.

Incubation starts with the laying of the first egg. A second egg is sometimes laid at an interval of up to seven days. With an incubation time of 28–30 days, if the two eggs are fertile and both hatch, very rarely do both chicks make it fledging. If one has the time and is capable of hand-rearing, the second egg can be removed prior to hatching or fostered under another pair of birds.

Captive *Calyptorhynchus funereus xanthanotus* will quite

often rear both chicks all the way through to independence. I do not know if this is true of the birds in the wild.

When chicks hatch, they are covered with a long, bright yellow down. Within the first seven to ten days, the chick will hardly progress with development but from thereafter the progress of the chick development is rapid. By day 20–22 the eyes start to open and pin feathers appear.

If the chick is left with the parents, it will fledge around 80–90 days. When they leave, the chicks will have some down peeking through the feathers, light grey beak and dull yellow ear coverts. Youngsters will be fed mostly by the male after fledging and for up to 12 months. I prefer to leave the young with parents for five to six months after fledging.

Experienced breeders can visually determine the sex of young immature birds as the female has a longer and more erect crest than the male does.

Full adult plumage is acquired at approximately 18–24 months of age.

Those that are a little unsure and do not want to wait the 18–24 months for their young to color up can either opt for DNA or surgical sexing to get a result earlier.

Diet

As aviculturists, we should always try to provide a well

balanced diet for all of our birds. There is not one diet to feed all, as every species requires something different for their daily requirements. The Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo seems to thrive on and be tolerant to a high-protein and high-fat diet. With this, one should not feed a plain sunflower diet. At all times I have available a basic seed mix of grey sunflower, safflower and plain canary seed. Daily, we give the birds a fruit and veggie mix made up of apples, oranges, grapes, beans, peas, corn on the cob as well as kernels, grated carrot and beetroot. Prior to and throughout the breeding season I add a sprouted seed mix of grey sunflower, wheat and safflower. To this I add a liquid calcium supplement.

When available I supply banksia, casuarina, and pinecones and the birds scream with delight when they see me coming with a bucket full of these soon-to-be destroyed treats. These cones can be kept fresh for some time if they are kept in a cool, dry environment.

Housing

As we all know, cockatoos and many of the large psittacines are known to be strong chewers. The Yellow-tailed Black is up there as one of the worst, being able to destroy any piece of timber within a short time. Because of this, all aviary construction should be made of steel.

The size of the aviary needs to be adequate enough to offer



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the birds room to fly and exercise to maintain their own physical condition. I would recommend an aviary to be a minimum of 4m long (12 ft) x 2m (6 ft) wide x 2.4 m (8 ft) high. As mentioned earlier, the Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo has a very destructive beak and I would recommend and use 25mm x 25mm x 3mm gauge weldmesh.

This heavy gauge wire will be able to tolerate the Yellow-tailed beak. I also have double wiring between flights; two-thirds of the flight is open to the weather, with the last third roofed and sides enclosed to give the birds privacy between neighbouring pairs as well as shelter from the sun.

During rainfall you would expect to see your birds go and find shelter but not the Yellow-tailed or any of the Black Cockatoos as they love getting wet. Along the rear of the flight a walkway of at least four feet wide is recommended to service the flights. Being this wide or wider, one can push a food cart or wheelbarrow easily between flights.

As for all birds, a natural and non-toxic perch of irregular size (3 in.–6 in. in diameter) should be installed for the exercise of their feet. The owners of Yellow-taileds will always be on the lookout for future replacement perches as the birds delight in chewing up fresh branches.

Mutations

At least once a year there are sightings around their range of birds that show a yellow suffusion from a few feathers to an

almost pied looking bird. There have also been birds that look almost completely yellow. There have been sightings of a light brown/cinnamon colored bird in the wild around Bowral, the central highlands of New South Wales.

Editor's Comment

Through the dedication and perseverance of select Australian aviculturists, this rare and beautiful mutation of the Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo has been reproduced in captivity with visually stunning results. We hope that our readers will receive updates as this amazing endeavor continues.

Conclusion

A major challenge for any aviculturist is to optimise all aspects of husbandry including housing and diet. The more challenging a species like the Yellow-tailed Black, the greater sense of achievement one obtains when active, healthy young are produced that go on to develop as viable, productive birds.

The attraction of keeping any of the cockatoo species lies with the outgoing personalities. The behaviors both of the group as a whole and with the individual variations will forever make these birds a very attractive cockatoo species as pet and aviary birds.

References

Sindel, S. And Lynn, R. (1988), Australian Cockatoos, Singel Press, Australia.

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