



Cocanarup Conservation Alliance Inc.

Protecting and promoting the environmental and cultural integrity of the Ravensthorpe region

NEWSLETTER – MAY 2022

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2021 Cocanarup nest survey results

As in previous years, the Cocanarup Conservation Alliance (CCA) worked with staff from BirdLife Australia to organise and coordinate the annual survey of Carnaby's black-cockatoo nesting activity in and around the Cocanarup area, south-west of Ravensthorpe. Two periods of survey activity took place: in mid-October and in early November, involving 2 Birdlife Australia staff and 15 local volunteers. Outcomes were as follows:

- o 309 large mature salmon gums were surveyed
- o 253 trees were considered viable nest trees, and were logged in the BirdLife data system
- o 59 trees had confirmed breeding activity (either live chicks, eggs, or both)
- o 1 attempt to breed in an installed artificial hollow, but eggs were abandoned

Comparison with previous years:

- o 2019: 179 viable trees surveyed, 70 with active nests
- o 2020: 222 viable trees surveyed, 57 with active nests
- o 2021: 253 viable trees surveyed, 59 with active nests

The survey effort this year increased and slightly more nests were found than last year but less than in the very productive 2019 season. This apparent decline in nesting activity might be of concern, especially as Cocanarup is considered the single most important natural nesting site for Carnaby's (world-wide). It is thought that the decline may be a consequence of a period of dry years reducing seed-set in the plants that the birds rely on – though it may also mark the ongoing decline of the species (thought to be +/- 10% p.a.).

On a more positive note, each year's survey activity is increasing our knowledge and mapping of viable nest trees, which continues to enhance the importance of Cocanarup for the long-term survival of the species.



Carnaby's eggs in a large salmon gum hollow in Cocanarup



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Murdoch University's Black Cockatoo Conservation Management Project: *Another successful tracking season*

Article and photos supplied by Zoe Kissane, Murdoch University.

In November last year (2021), Murdoch University again attached satellite and GPS tracking devices to four adult Carnaby's black cockatoos at a breeding ground just south of Newdegate (Fig. 1). The Newdegate flock have since shown similar movements to last season, making their way down to Hopetoun again in early January. All four tagged birds arrived in Hopetoun by mid-January 2022 with the journey from Newdegate to Hopetoun taking approximately two days. Tracking data has shown stopover points for these tagged birds to be just north of Cocanarup, before making their way to Hopetoun via the Fitzgerald River National Park.

Once in Hopetoun the flock from Newdegate was joined by several other flocks, with up to 600 cockatoos being observed together at any one time. Regular roost sites included the Jerdacuttup Lakes Nature Reserve, some locations in town, and the bushland surrounding the Culham Inlet. Forage behaviour was similar to last year (a mix of native vegetation, pine and agricultural seed; Fig. 1), however there seemed to be more canola grown around Hopetoun this season, with birds frequently foraging on fallen canola seeds in farm paddocks. All four of the tagged birds from Newdegate from the previous breeding season were also observed (identified via the colour bands on their feet) during regular (fortnightly) fieldwork visits to Hopetoun this season.



Fig. 2: CC 2727 with GPS (back tag) and satellite tag (sticking out from tail feathers) at the breeding ground in Newdegate.

There was a superstar bird this year who managed to keep his GPS tag on for 123 days (see Fig. 2), which is 29 days more than the previous record of GPS data collected from one bird (94 days, which was also a bird from Newdegate last season). This bird moulted out his tail feather tag (the one used to locate him) in February, however I managed to still collect GPS data until early April by regularly following the flock and setting up a relay field while the birds were foraging or roosting.

The nestling of this bird (CC 2727) was also spotted on a number of occasions during fieldwork (whilst drinking from a dam, foraging on a canola seed spill and also being fed by its mother; Fig. 3, next page). All four satellite tail tags were moulted out by the tagged birds by March, however I continued regular fortnightly field visits to Hopetoun until early May and managed to recover all four of those moulted tags during this time.

The Murdoch team are still hopeful of being able to conduct tracking work at Cocanarup next season and are in regular talks with the CCA about the logistics of this work.



Fig. 1: Morning forage on *Banksia speciosa*, *grevillea* and pine



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Fig. 3: Nestling (colour bands white/pink) of CC 2727 observed during fieldwork drinking from a dam and being fed by its mother

Great Cocky Count – the annual census

“The Great Cocky Count (GCC) is a long-term citizen science survey and the biggest single survey for black cockatoos in Western Australia. On one night in autumn, volunteers monitor known roost sites and count black cockatoos as they come in to their evening roosts. Records submitted from across the southwest provide a snapshot of black cockatoo populations, and over time this has helped us quantify the changes in black cockatoo numbers.”

<https://birdlife.org.au/projects/southwest-black-cockatoo-recovery/great-cocky-count-swbc>
(28/4/22)

This year on the appointed evening we monitored a site near the Oldfield River, west of Munglinup and like last year recorded between 400 – 500 Carnaby's black cockatoo flying to their roost-site. This was the only flock of cockatoos officially recorded for the Great Cocky Count this year in the Hopetoun – Munglinup district but a flock of about the same number was recorded the evening before the official count, roosting close to the Phillips River and the Fitzgerald River National Park, 60 km west of the Oldfield River roost. Unfortunately, this site was not monitored on the night of the count, but it seems reasonable to assume that there were at least 900 birds in this Hopetoun – Munglinup section of the south coast on that evening. Flocks of similar sizes have recently been recorded from Gibson, just north of Esperance, and from Cape Arid National Park, well east of Esperance.

Chuditch and heath mice - Cocanarup & surrounds.

Article and photo by Sarah Comer, regional ecologist, Parks & Wildlife

Over the past six months the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) team have been conducting surveys for two threatened mammals in the Cocanarup – Ravensthorpe area. This includes surveys in late November for heath mouse (*Pseudomys shortridgeii*) at historical sites in the Ravensthorpe Range and Location 1040, supported by Regional and Biodiversity Conservation Science staff. Unfortunately, no heath mouse were found over the seven nights (1,500 trap nights), which was very disappointing. Some suitable heath mouse habitat has been identified in Cocanarup, near the site where a heath mouse was caught by Andy Chapman in 1986, but this wasn't surveyed on this occasion. Plans to monitor the western end of the Fitzgerald River National Park have been postponed to early spring, and hopefully these will be more successful.

In recent years the Chuditch Recovery Team has been trying to establish the status of the chuditch (*Dasyurus geoffroyi*) population, including relative abundance and genetic diversity, across a broad area of the species known distribution. Cocanarup and the Ravensthorpe range were cage trapped by Brent Johnson in 2007, and four and six animals located in each area respectively.



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Chuditch. Photo courtesy Sarah Comer, Parks & Wildlife

Subsequent cage and camera trapping in the Fitzgerald River National Park and Cocanarup, carried out as part of the *Eradicat*® baiting trials, found good numbers of chuditch in the Park and in 2015 and 2016 a small number of animals were part of the translocation of chuditch to the Flinders Range (<https://www.landscape.sa.gov.au/saal/plants-and-animals/native-plants-and-animals/bounceback/western-quoll-idnya>).

In April 2022 Brent returned to the south coast to monitor the Cocanarup – Ravensthorpe area with the support of Western Shield and Albany District staff. This team completed four nights of cage trapping in Cocanarup and the Ravensthorpe Range which resulted in four captures, three females and one male. Genetic material has been collected from all of these animals, but DBCA are still keen to get reports of chuditch sightings in the area and samples from any road kill found. Sightings can be reported via:

<https://www.dpaw.wa.gov.au/plants-and-animals/threatened-species-and-communities/threatened-animals> or the local DBCA office (9842 4500).

'Uncovering Cocanarup' event deferred

The Cocanarup Conservation Alliance Inc. organised an event for late February which we called, *'Uncovering Cocanarup'*. It was designed as an escorted full-day tour through the Cocanarup – Kundip area with Nathan McQuoid, landscape ecologist, as leader. The tour was designed for decision-makers and interested members of the community and we were going to visit a selection of sites between Cocanarup and Kundip, with an opportunity for questions and discussion at each.

We were very pleased with the response to this event, indicating a significant interest in the area from a broad range of government officials, organisations and individuals. Unfortunately, we had to defer it at the last moment due to an unfavourable weather forecast and uncertainty and limitations posed by Covid. We now intend holding a similar event in mid to late November.

Noongar-related projects and the SWNTS

Local members of CCA are involved in at least two Noongar-related projects in the Ravensthorpe-Hopetoun area. The first of these is the *Genestreams Songlines Sculptures Project*, a network of local projects which combine art, conservation and Noongar culture. More information about this original and exciting concept can be found at: <http://sciart.com.au/genestreams-songlines-sculpture-development-process/> Some of you will be aware of the installation on the Twin Creeks property on the northern side of the Porongorups, which is part of the overall project.

Artist and facilitator (Mali Moir & Ben Beeton) plan to be in residence in Ravensthorpe for a month from mid-May. They will work with Noongar groups and locals, and anticipate using the Regional Herbarium as an important resource.

A second project has been initiated by the local organisation, Fitzgerald Business Network (FBN), who have stimulated the formation of a group called *'Shared Journey to Country'*. *'This is a collective of community members and community group-representatives who are keen to develop their knowledge of local Aboriginal culture and history and to collaborate on related initiatives and activities in the region. This group was originally conceived as a way to approach a collective Reconciliation Action Plan, however it has since evolved into its current form - as a platform to share, learn and collaborate.'* One of the first activities proposed is a dual language signage project, to explore the possibility of dual naming of places in the district.

CCA welcomes the opportunity these projects provide for active participation with Noongar groups and individuals who obviously have a deep knowledge of this country. The projects are an upshot of the recognition of native title and the South West Native Title Settlement.



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As part of the Settlement, a substantial area in the Ravensthorpe district is likely to become part of the Noongar Land Estate. For information about the current situation in this regard, see the 'interactive map' at:

<https://www.noongar.org.au/noongar-land-estate>

It is also noted that the 4 initial directors of the Wagyl Kaip Aboriginal Corporation have now been elected, which is an important step in the administrative process relating to the implementation of native title. Congratulations to successful candidates: Oscar Colbung, Mervyn Eades, Malcolm Williams and Jeanice Krakouer.

Pressure from mining and exploration companies

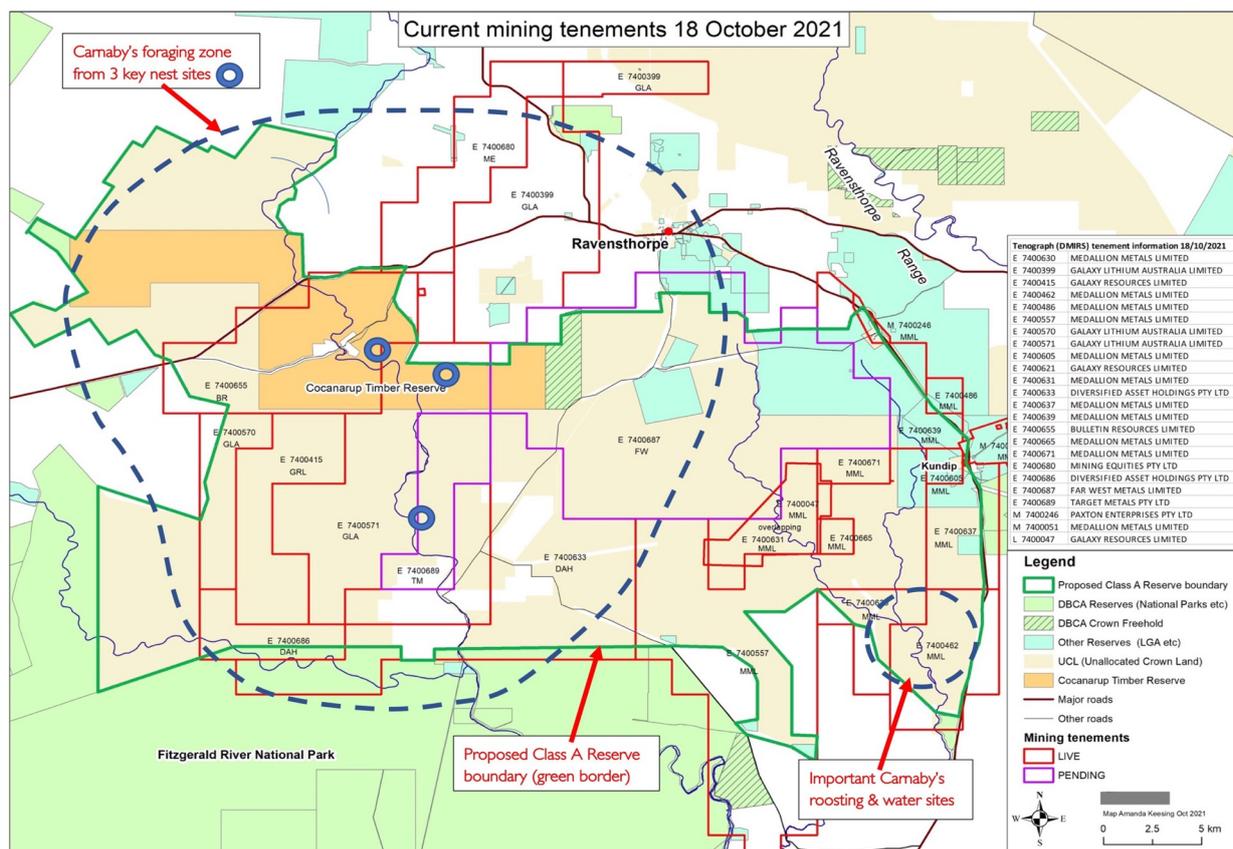
The Cocanarup – Kundip area is still completely covered by tenements, as is shown in the map below. All but two of these tenements are for mineral exploration. The only change since this map was prepared is that two pending applications E74/689 (Target Metals Ltd.) and E74/687 (Far West Metals Ltd.) have now been granted, making it clear there's no moratorium on granting leases.

E74/687 which sits centrally in the Cocanarup – Kundip area is very large (15,000 ha.) close to 25% of the whole area.

The other main tenement holders in the Cocanarup – Kundip area are Medallion Metals Ltd. who are interested in gold (and related minerals) with tenements around Kundip, and Galaxy Lithium Australia Ltd. who already operate a lithium mine in Ravensthorpe, which has tenements on the western side.

Galaxy Lithium Australia Ltd. and Bulletin Resources Ltd. have tenements over the main Carnaby's black-cockatoo nesting area.

The map below shows the foraging area required for successful fledging of chicks raised in the three primary nesting areas in CCA's proposed Class A Reserve area. Exploration – and, in particular, active mining – in this area could have dramatic impacts on what is considered the single most important natural nesting site for the endangered Carnaby's black cockatoo. The eastern portion of the area contains important roosting, feeding and water sites for the adult birds of the south coast.





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Annual General Meeting 2021

The annual general meeting of CCA was held in Ravensthorpe on December 4th 2021. The following were elected to official positions:

- o Chairperson – Rosemary Jasper
- o Deputy Chair – Chris Biddulph
- o Secretary – Colin Youngs
- o Treasurer - Ron Richards
- o Members of Committee – Jen Biddulph, John Tucker, Jesse Brampton.

After the official business, Andrew Chapman, zoologist and local resident, gave a presentation on the subject of his Master's thesis, the spotted minnow - a small fish that lives in the waterways in the semi-arid area around Ravensthorpe, but is also found in clear, cold, mountain streams elsewhere in the world.

What's happening in the Cocanarup bush?

To finish this newsletter, it seems appropriate to record some of what is happening in the bush in Noongar - Wudjari country, in this Noongar season of Djeran.

We are well and truly into the season of Djeran: the wind has dropped and daily temperatures are cooler, which has made for beautiful calm, mild days. In addition, we have been treated to some significant falls of rain.



The summer was drier than average and the bush was starting to languish but in April this changed when an unusual weather event brought flooding rains to much of the area. Ravensthorpe experienced its highest daily April rainfall on record on the 13th, with a total of 111 mm recorded. The rain saturated the country and made even the smallest of creeks and gullies run, causing the rivers to flood and the inlets to fill. The total rainfall for the month was 164 mm compared to the mean monthly rainfall of 32 mm. This rain has brought the country to life and augers well for a productive season in the bush.

As soon as the water started moving the humming frogs were calling, and these were followed by other species (including motor-bike frogs, quacking froglets, Gunther's toadlets and banjo frogs). As far as birds go, general activity has increased: cuckoos are calling and wattle birds, honeyeaters and purple crowned lorikeets have descended on patches of flowering yates. Square-tailed kites have departed; one pair having successfully raised 3 chicks to fledglings.

The photographs that follow provide a snapshot of some of the plants that are flowering and the fauna to be found in the Cocanarup – Kundip bush now. Most of these are common species, but it is common species that comprise the fabric of the bush. They make up 'nature' as we relate to it and that, above all, is what we need to champion!

So, in celebration of the bush, here are a few photos from the Cocanarup – Kundip area in this season of Djeran. Enjoy!



*Southern plains banksia (Banksia media), left, and blue mallee / Tallerack (Eucalyptus pleurocarpa) fruit, above.
Both photos courtesy Rosemary Jasper*



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Grevillea sulcata, a Ravensthorpe endemic and priority species, above (Rosemary Jasper), and leafless orchid (*Praecoxanthus aphyllus*) below (Jen Biddulph)



Banjo frog (*Limnodynastes dorsalis*). Courtesy Jen Biddulph



Pin-cushion hakea (*Hakea laurina*). The seed is an important food source for Camaby's. Courtesy Rosemary Jasper



Large orb-weaving spider. Courtesy Rosemary Jasper