

Tipping Point for Cockatoos in Perth

Will Carnaby's black cockatoo be squeezed out by urbanization?

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- Banksia woodlands and pine plantations on the Swan Coastal Plain are critical foraging habitat for Carnaby's black cockatoo. Banksia woodland is being cleared for development and most pine plantations will be harvested without replacement over the next 14 years.
- Substantial loss of feeding habitat will drive further decline of the already endangered Carnaby's black cockatoo.



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Carnaby's black cockatoo feeding on *Banksia attenuata*. Photo LE Valentine

Flocks of these gregarious birds are common-place in Perth during the non-breeding season (January–July). They are strongly evocative of the west Australian landscape and an important connection to nature for people living in the city. Yet these regular sightings hide an important truth: Carnaby's black cockatoo has undergone a major decline in range and abundance since the 1960s. The bird is listed as endangered under the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act. Work by Dr Denis Saunders over the past 30 years and by others shows that the cockatoos have declined in response to landscape fragmentation and habitat loss in south-western Australia.

The Swan Coastal Plain (SCP) is an important foraging area for the cockatoos during their non-breeding season, where potentially a quarter of the breeding population feed in banksia woodlands and commercial pine plantations. However, a rapidly growing urban population coupled with declining rainfall is straining Perth's land and water supplies. Banksia woodland is being cleared to make way for housing and infrastructure while pines are being harvested to fulfill a commercial contract and because these trees limit groundwater recharge. Native vegetation on the SCP was 41.2 % of pre-European extent in 2006 (~549 567 ha) and ~15 389 ha was under pine in 2009.

Effective land-use planning could ensure that critical foraging habitat is retained or restored on the SCP. A mix of banksia-woodland species are suggested for the restoration of feeding habitat, along with the retention of priority banksia woodlands and some pine plantations. While restoration is undoubtedly part of the effort needed to ensure the survival of the cockatoos, it may not compensate for the ongoing loss of banksia woodland and pine. Ultimately, Carnaby's black cockatoo may be left with insufficient food resources.