

BREEDING OF THE FUNERAL COCKATOO IN CLELAND CONSERVATION PARK

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The Funeral Cockatoo *Calyptorhynchus funereus* (known in eastern Australia as the Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo before the taxonomic revision of Saunders 1979), is a moderately common species in the South Mount Lofty Ranges (SAOA 1977; it is noted that some concern for the viability of the Ranges population of this species has been informally expressed. — Ed.). Its breeding range there is poorly known, the only major known sites being in the Spring Mount and Deep Creek Conservation Parks (Paton & Reid 1977). G. Ragless has reported (in Lendon 1973) other minor breeding records as far north as Basket Range east of Adelaide.

The Cleland Conservation Park, near Adelaide on the western slopes of Mount Lofty, was visited by the author in November 1982, then frequently in the following two months once it became apparent that more than 30 Funeral Cockatoos were roosting in the Park. On 16 January 1983, a female was flushed from a hole in a Messmate Stringybark *Eucalyptus obliqua* but approached the tree again within an hour. Wood had been torn away from the edges of the hole, presumably by Funeral Cockatoos, to provide a bed of chips on the hollow floor.

The tree was revisited on 22 January 1983 in the company of several other observers and the Park Ranger, and was climbed. A young bird was found inside and was estimated as being approximately 10 days old by J. Paton and G. Ragless.

The tree stood at about 425m above sea level, in a shallow gully on a hillside between the Native Wildlife Zone and Waterfall Gully. The vegetation in the area was low open woodland with a dense heathy understorey. The main trunk of the tree had broken off at about 7m above ground level, living branches making the height up to about 9m. A hollow extended down the main trunk to about 4m above ground level. The top 1.5m of the wall of the hollow on the south side was missing. On the west side, a large hole with its bottom edge 5m above ground level joined the hollow. This western hole was used by the adult birds for access and as the source of wood chips. The base of the hollow has a diameter of ca 30cm and a

floor of wood chips. On this base there were three pieces of egg shell, which were apparently parts of the two eggs, and the young bird, which emitted rasping noises whenever disturbed. The nestling was about 15cm long, with greyish-yellow down and a light-coloured bill.

Searches in the Park, mostly along walking tracks and fire access tracks, revealed some 50 other trees from which wood had been torn away around large (more than 15cm across) holes in trunks and branches. These were situated across the Park from Waterfall gully on the west side to near Mount Lofty and Mount Bonython on the east side; they suggested a breeding ground more than two kilometres across. Many other areas in the Park were not checked and a widespread search for nesting sites of this Cockatoo in the South Mount Lofty Ranges is recommended.

Most of Cleland Conservation Park was burnt out in the severe bushfires of 16 February 1983 and it is expected that any nesting Funeral Cockatoos in the areas burnt would have perished. Knowledge of how long it is before the Cockatoos again use the Park, either for feeding, roosting or nesting, will help in evaluating the future of the species in the Mount Lofty Ranges.

The co-operation of the South Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service in granting permission to climb the nesting tree is gratefully acknowledged.

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