

2

COCKATOO SPECIES

In general terms, cockatoos are a homogenous group. Although species differ in appearance, we instantly recognise them all as belonging to the same family of birds. The ecology of different species is also broadly similar – they use tree hollows for nesting and birds come together to feed on the ground or in the canopy on seeds. Within these broad parameters, however, there are significant differences in appearance and ecology between and even within species. The following ‘species snapshots’ briefly outline the ecology of each cockatoo species and, where relevant, subspecies, including their distribution, habitat preferences, principal foods and favoured nest sites.

Palm Cockatoo

The Palm Cockatoo is a large grey-black cockatoo, distinguished from other black cockatoos by the absence of a coloured panel in its tail. It has long, narrow crest feathers that are individually distinct when raised and that fall foppishly along the head when relaxed. Its most distinctive physical features are its bare red facial skin, which deepens in colour during display, and the long curved beak which is one of the largest in the parrot order. Palm Cockatoos are famous for their drumming display – males use a branch, nut or clenched foot to beat on the edge of their nest hollow. Drumsticks may be specially fashioned for the purpose, a rare example of tool use in birds. Three subspecies are recognised: the Cape York Cockatoo occurs on the Aru Islands, southern New Guinea and Cape York in Australia, the Goliath Cockatoo occurs in western and central New Guinea, while the Northern Palm Cockatoo occurs in northern New Guinea.

In Australia, Palm Cockatoos are found on Cape York north of Lakefield National Park. They depend on closed forests, and cannot be