5
HABITATS AND DISTRIBUTION

Cockatoos occupy most habitats throughout their distribution, from mangrove forests to sub-alpine woodlands. However, particular species are associated with specific habitats, the availability of which limits their distribution. Habitat suitability depends on food and water, nest sites and roost sites. Roost sites are of secondary importance – although cockatoos prefer certain types of roosts, they can make do with what's available. The potential for suitable food and nest sites in an area largely depends upon vegetation, and vegetation type can be used as a surrogate for habitat type. The availability of water is determined broadly by climate and at a finer scale by topographic features. While the availability of nest sites determines the breeding range of a species, it is the presence of food and water that ultimately determines distribution.

Australia is a hot dry continent. The mainland is dominated by its arid centre, bounded by bands of increasingly higher rainfall toward the coast. The distribution of broad vegetation types closely mirrors rainfall. The arid centre is vast, around one-third of the continent, and contains a variety of vegetation types. Spinifex grasslands dominate much of the centre, with areas of saltbush shrublands and low open woodlands. Away from the arid zone, the vegetation increases in height and the distance between the canopies of adjoining trees becomes less. If we travel from the arid zone to the coast we pass through shrublands, low open woodlands, woodlands and forests before finally passing through the tall forests that adjoin the coast in many areas.

The restricted latitudinal range occupied by the south-east Asian islands that support cockatoos means there is little variation in vegetation type. A typical island is low-lying and relatively flat, with a small area of mountainous country. The vegetation is dominated by lowland tropical rainforest, with lesser areas of montane rainforest at higher elevations. Mangroves are present along the coast, commonly where inlets and