

Gang-gang Cockatoo

FAMILY: *Cacatuidae*
GENUS: *Callocephalon*
SPECIES: *fimbriatum*

Description:

Small to medium cockatoo with dusky grey body plumage which is narrowly scalloped in dull white and a scarlet head. Females and immature birds are dull grey (often with a greenish tinge). Females often have orange barring on the chest. Both sexes have a "feather-duster" crest which they are unable to raise.

Immature birds resemble the female Gang-gang in body plumage. However, all males carry some red colouring on their heads. The extent of this colour varies considerably between birds however.

Length:350mm.

Distribution:

Restricted to south eastern mainland Australia from Portland (Vic.) to Blue Mountains (NSW). It has been introduced on Kangaroo Island and has been recorded as a vagrant in Tasmania. Since European settlement it has declined in number and is now considered to be most common in the southern highlands.

Habitat:

Tall eucalypt forests and adjacent woodlands. Also in suburban parks and gardens.

Diet:

Eucalypt seeds, fruits and insects and the fruits of the introduced hawthorn. Food sources are usually exploited until exhausted.

Breeding:

From September to January.

The usual nesting site is a tree cavity in a eucalypt near water. Both the male and female prepare the nesting site, and both share incubation and care for the young.

Gang-gangs usually prefer vertical nesting logs with an internal diameter of about 30cm with entrances at the side near the top. However, they have also bred successfully in nesting boxes of about 30cmx30cmx50cm with a spout entrance near the top. The preferred nesting material is a mixture of wood shavings and dirt or peat moss.

Courtship Display

This is most often performed very near or at the entrance of the nest hollow. The male calls to the female with wings spread and body held fully erect. Like other cockatoos, his behaviour becomes rather excited. A receptive female will usually fly to the hollow entrance and inspect it. This may be accompanied by some chewing at the hollow's entrance. Copulation follows shortly afterward.

Sexual maturity

This species becomes sexually active at about 4 years of age.

Clutch:

2 white oval eggs. Incubation period: about 20 days. Fledging usually occurs at 40 days, but young remain dependant for 4-6 months.

Mutations and Hybrids:

There is one reported case of a cinnamon mutation in the wild.

Hybrids have been recorded with Galahs and Corellas.

Suitable Aviaries and Compatible Birds

As a minimum, a single bird may be housed in such a cage provided it measures at least 800mm x 600mm x 1200mm (approximately). Pairs can be kept in a slightly larger cage. However, these birds always fare better (and look more spectacular) in larger aviaries. These should be somewhere in the vicinity of 2m wide x 2m high x 5 or 6m long so as to provide amply flight space and to accommodate nesting logs etc.

The wire should be of a heavy duty grade, as cockatoos easily chew holes in lighter grade wire. Similarly, the frame should be constructed of steel to avoid the birds chewing the structure away.

This cockatoo is particularly fond of chewing (especially young birds) and require regular supplies of large leafy branches (preferably with gum-nuts) which they will strip in no time at all. Branches should also be placed in the cage/aviary such that it produces a climbing complex similar to the structure of a tree-crown. This provides the birds with an extra distraction and helps to relieve boredom.

Species Specific Problems

Gang-gang cockatoos usually prefer not to spend too much time on the ground. However, many young (and some mature) birds have been seen spending a considerable amount of time on the ground. This behaviour makes them susceptible to infection with intestinal worms and fungi. These are relatively easily dealt with however simply by maintaining a high standard of hygiene.

Another problem encountered in this species is Psittacine beak and feather disease. This is an incurable disease which is transmitted through faeces. Essentially, it results in poor feather growth and feathers which don't replace themselves when they fall out. Similarly, the beak is also affected and becomes fragile and does not repair itself.

It is advisable to test birds suspected to have this condition. The best course of action for affected birds is to destroy them as there is no cure. Infected birds will infect their offspring simply by feeding them as there is always chances of contact with faeces in the nest and during feeding of the young.

Feather plucking is also quite common in Gang-gang Cockatoos. This has a range of causes and can usually be rectified (see our articles in the "Regular Features" section of our website). However, personal experience suggests that this is a problem caused by boredom or perhaps trauma. The most likely scenario is that the birds are not being supplied with ample chewing materials (branches, nuts, leaves, etc.) or that their aviary is not suitably set up. (see above). It has also been suggested that plucking arises out of an incompatibility between mates. This may arise from "sexual frustration" or indeed simply because the two birds don't get on and stress one another.