

# Red-tailed Black Cockatoo

**FAMILY:** *Cacatuidae*  
**GENUS:** *Calyptorhynchus*  
**SPECIES:** *banksii*(formerly *magnificus*)

## **Description:**

Large gregarious cockatoo. Adult males are completely black with bright red tail panels. Females and immature birds are more dusky black with yellow speckles on the head and back. Feathers on the underside are scalloped with yellow. Tail panels are dull orange or yellow with black barring.

This bird is mostly arboreal but is frequently encountered feeding on the ground.

Length: 550-660mm.

Weight: 750grams (average).

## **Subspecies:**

*Calyptorhynchus banksii* is the nominate species and no sub-species are formally recognised. However there is evidence of some 7 separate and distinct populations which aviculturalists and some authorities have placed into the following sub-species: *C. b. banksii* (nominate sub-species); *C. b. macrorhynchus* (broader, heavier beak, female has pale yellow barring on the tail); *C. b. samueli* (smaller bird with smaller narrower beak) ; *C. b. naso* (also small but with broader beak and shorter more rounded crest).

## **Distribution:**

Throughout mainland Australia, but numbers have declined significantly in the south-east of its range since the arrival of Europeans.

## **Habitat:**

Open woodland, riparian (gallery) forests, mallee, Savannah, Mulga, rainforest and cultivated lands.

## **Diet:**

Seeds, fruit, bulbs of native species and insects.

## **Breeding:**

Varies throughout range. July-January in south-east, March-September in north and July-October in west.

The usual nesting site is a large hollow limb or trunk in a eucalypt, usually more than 15m above ground level. The nesting chamber varies in depth up to 2m. The nest is most often lined with chewed and decayed wood. The female incubates the eggs, whilst both parents are involved in rearing the young. During incubation, the male will feed the female

In captivity Red-tailed Blacks seem to prefer nesting logs of about 1.5m in height with an internal diameter of about 30-40cm and an entrance of at least 20cm diameter. Logs should be suspended vertically or may be placed (upright) on the aviary floor. The preferred nesting material is a mixture of wood shavings and dirt or peat moss.

## **Courtship Display:**

Males approach females in an excited and animated manner, strutting along the perch with the tail feathers fanned, crest and head plumage ruffed almost to the extent that the beak is hidden and bowing periodically. He accompanies this with a low muffled (gurgling) sound. A successful display is usually followed by the male feeding the female.

## **Sexual Maturity:**

These birds are sexually mature at about 4-5 years, although some have been recorded to breed at a younger age.

## **Clutch:**

1 white oval egg. Incubation period: about 30 days. Fledging usually occurs at about 90 days. Once fledged, the young remains dependant on the parents for a further 3 months.

## **Mutations and Hybrids:**

Hybrids between subspecies (*C. b. banksii* and *C.b. macrohynchus*) have been recorded.

## **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.

## **Species Specific Problems**

Intestinal worms are a common problem in species which spend considerable time on the ground. Similarly, fungal infections may become a problem. 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. The bills of birds with this condition have a deep black, glossy appearance rather than the normal chalky grey colour. 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 may also occur.