



## The Corella Conundrum

In the Western Australian Wheatbelt, white corellas have reached plague proportions on the back of our nation's largest export grain producing region. So significant are the social, economic and environmental effects from the birds, that management has become imperative.

There are three species of corella in the Wheatbelt. They are hardy, highly adaptive, birds that live between 15 - 70 years depending on the species, producing 1- 4 eggs per year. They easily out-compete galahs and cockatoos for precious nesting hollows and fledging survival rates are strong. Without intervention, numbers will continue to grow.

This fact sheet outlines the options open to councils, industry and residents in controlling these Australian native birds who, through human intervention, have become so significant a liability.

Essentially options fall into two categories, culling and habitat management, both of which have pros and cons.

### Culling

#### Shooting

In Western Australia, shooting is currently the only method of culling corellas that can be undertaken without a permit from the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA).

##### **Pros**

If the birds are taken by surprise, and the work is undertaken by teams of experienced operators, shooting can be effective. The birds are however highly intelligent and can quickly recognize patterns in behaviour, flying away before shooters can mobilize.

##### **Cons**

Shooting is not permitted in densely populated town settings. Injured birds can fly distances before dropping into school grounds, backyards and public spaces causing significant public distress. Most Wheatbelt Councils report that the community outcry from shooting is so severe that shooting the birds is not an option.

#### Trapping

Grain can be used to trap birds using nets or cages after a period of pre-feeding.

##### **Pros**

Quieter, easier to keep away from the public eye.

##### **Cons**

Requires pre-feeding and specialist equipment.

It's more expensive and requires a 'Taking of Fauna' permit, issued by DBCA. This rigorous permit process requires the applicant to demonstrate expert knowledge of bird handling, species identification and a range of other competencies. There also needs to be a method of culling the birds after they have been trapped. This might be shooting or could be carbon dioxide or carbon monoxide gas chambers.

## Alpha-chloralose

Another potential method, which is under investigation, is the use of the chemical alpha-chloralose. The drug acts as an anaesthetic to the birds. It can be supplied to the birds in lethal or sub-lethal doses. It is currently approved for use in lethal doses with pigeons however, if this method were to be used in the Wheatbelt, other non-target grain eating birds, including endangered black cockatoo species, could be inadvertently killed.

Consequently, sub-lethal doses would be required if it were to be approved for use on corellas so that any non-target species that succumbed could be moved to safe recovery facilities, while the target species are gathered and gassed or shot.

Currently the approval process for alpha-chloralose is in step 2 of a 5 step process that requires a collaboration between the Department of Health, DBCA and the Department of Primary Industries & Regional Development. It has taken two years to reach this stage in the process.

## Habitat management

Non-lethal control measures focus around preventing the birds from being able to damage infrastructure, or encouraging the birds to move away from areas where they are a problem. None of these options however, are an easy fix.

Damage prevention includes strategies such as putting powerlines underground. This would be effective but is cost prohibitive. New built infrastructure can be made to prevent damage exchanging rubber for metal, adding spikes or rolling polypipes to potential landing sites. Again, this adds to the cost of builds. Retro-fitting existing infrastructure is more difficult and expensive again.

Watering points such as dams can be revegetated which deters corellas from landing as it obscures their view of approaching predators. A farmer in south Australia has designed a system for water troughs which still allows stock access whilst making it more difficult for corellas to land.

The birds can be lured away from problem sites in towns and CBH depots by creating attractive alternatives elsewhere. Known as decoy sites, a key requirement is plentiful access to grain, and the provision of a safe, undisturbed place to roost. At the same time, it is necessary to take actions to make problem roosting sites less attractive.

Apart from the expense, habitat management effectively relocates the problem, rather than controls it.

## References:

DBCA (2024): Fauna Licences. <https://www.dbca.wa.gov.au/licences-and-permits/fauna> accessed 5/4/24



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