

THE CORELLAS

GENUS: *Cacatua*

SUBGENUS: *Licmetis*

Licmetis is a subgenus of the white cockatoos. They are collectively known as corellas in Australia. Three of the six species are primarily - or entirely - found in Australia, while the Philippines, Indonesia, and the Solomon Islands each have an endemic species. They are relatively small cockatoos with pale bills. While most show yellow-tinged underwings and some red to the face, none have conspicuously coloured crests.

The Australian representatives are: Long-billed Corella, *Cacatua tenuirostris*, Western Corella, *Cacatua pastinator* and Little, or Short-billed, Corella, *Cacatua sanguinea*.

The exotic members of the group are: Red-vented Cockatoo, *Cacatua haematuropygia*, Tanimbar, or Goffins, Corella, *Cacatua goffiniana*, and Ducorps' Cockatoo, *Cacatua ducorpsii*.

#1 THE LONG-BILLED CORELLA



Photo "Noodle snacks"

The Long-billed Corella is predominantly white, with a reddish-pink face and forehead. It has reddish-pink feathers on the breast and belly, and yellow on the underside of both the tail and wings. The beak is white with an elongated upper mandible, which is used to dig for roots and seeds. Adult Long-billed Corellas measure 38 to 41cm in length, have a wingspan of about 80-90cm with an average weight of 567gm.

The Long-billed Corella can be found in the wild in western Victoria and southern New South Wales. Feral populations have sprung up in several of the capital cities of Australia from escaped or released captive birds. This has implications in Western Australia where they might hybridize with the endangered southern race of the Western Corella. They are found in grassy woodlands and grasslands, including pasture, crops and urban parks.

Their call is a quick, quavering, falsetto *currup!*, *wulluk-wulluk*, or *cadillac-cadillac* combined with various harsh squawks and screeches.

The Long-billed Corella typically digs for roots, seeds, corms and bulbs, especially that of the weed Onion Grass. Native plants eaten include Murong, *Microseris lanceolata*, a perennial herb also known as Yam Daisy, but a large portion of the birds' diet now consists of introduced plants.

Long-bills are viewed as agricultural pests, particularly in western Victoria.

They can create significant crop damage and are also noted for tearing up asphalt along roadsides, and for sometimes damaging power lines.

A few years ago a farmer in the south-east of South Australia had his old rusted roof replaced with a smart new green colorbond one. The tek screws used to fasten it were covered with matching green plastic caps. The family were very impressed with the result, but the next day a flock of local Long-bills whiled away some idle time by systematically removing each of the plastic caps. The disgusted farmer waited until the birds seemed to have parted for greener pastures and then had the caps replaced. By some form of "bush telegraph" the Long-bills heard of this, and within a few days returned and once again removed every cap within a few hours. Since then the tek screws have remained uncovered unsightly though they may be. Score Long-bills two...farmer nil!



Digging for roots & seeds

Photo: Brett Donald

The breeding season is from July to November. They are reputed to form monogamous pairs and both sexes share the task of nest preparation, incubating the eggs and caring for the young. Nesting occurs in the hollows of large old eucalypts, and occasionally in cavities in loose gravelly cliffs. Two to three dull white, oval-shaped eggs are laid on a lining of decayed wood. The incubation period is twenty-four days with the chicks taking about fifty-six days to fledge.

Permits are sometimes issued in Victoria for the culling of this species, and annual licenses are issued for the taking of weaned young from the wild for the pet trade.

Long-billed Corellas are popular and affectionate pets due to their ability to mimic words and even whole sentences to perfection. They have an uncanny knack of associating words, or phrases with particular happenings, and soon acquire the ability to utter the right words to fit the occasion. They have been labelled the best "talker" of the Australian Cockatoos, and of all the psittacine species are usually only exceeded in their talking prowess by the African Grey Parrot. They have a very trustworthy nature, and unlike the Short-billed Corella are not prone to turning nasty at sexual maturity

The species was first described by the German naturalist Heinrich Kuhl (1797-1821) in 1820.

R.V.C. with help from Wikipedia

Series to be continued.