

Nearby crèche of four Galah chicks in the Hunter Region, New South Wales

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During a 24-year study of wild Galahs *Eolophus roseicapilla* breeding in nest boxes in our backyard, I recorded fledging times of chicks. In 2025, for the first time, four chicks fledged to a crèche that was visible from our front yard (distance 250 m). The three older siblings stayed in the crèche until the fourth and last chick fledged. These observations show that wild Galahs can breed successfully in suburbs without available tree hollows but with suitable nest boxes and crèches.

INTRODUCTION

The Galah *Eolophus roseicapilla* is a small cockatoo with a grey back, deep pink breast and belly, and pinkish-white cap. It lives in open habitats such as grasslands and farmlands. It is found in all states and territories of Australia (Australian Museum 2026).

Galahs feed on seeds, plants, and insects and their larvae (Higgins 1999). They have two main feeding sessions daily, each of which spans 1-4 hours, in chosen feeding areas. The first session begins shortly after sunrise and the second begins mid to late afternoon (Noske 1980; Pidgeon 1970).

Galahs form permanent pair bonds and in southern Australia they breed between July and December. They nest in a tree hollow lined with fresh eucalyptus leaves (Australian Museum 2026). Galahs lay 2-8 eggs per clutch (average 3.3-4.9). Eggs are laid every 2.7 days and hatch after 23.4 days (Rowley 1990). Both parents incubate the eggs and care for the young. The average nestling period is 49.4 to 52 days (Rowley 1990; Smith & Saunders 1986).

Most chicks fledge in the early morning (Higgins 1999) but some fledge in the late afternoon (Pryor 2018, 2023, 2024, 2025). Upon fledging, a chick usually flies away strongly with one parent on either side to a crèche (nursery) where fledglings are cared for until they become independent. The first flight distance may be as far as two kilometres (Doneley 2003; Higgins 1999; Rowley 1990). Siblings are taken to the same crèche, which may also have chicks from other broods. Here, chicks practise

flying and assemble to be fed when their parents return from foraging (Rowley 1990).

Siblings stay in the crèche until the last chick from the clutch has fledged (Higgins 1999). All the chicks are then guided by their parents to trees near the feeding area. They are fed there by their parents for a further 2-3 weeks. After this, they travel with their parents and are fed on the ground. They begin to self-feed one month after fledging. The parents stop returning to feed them 6-8 weeks post-fledging. The young then form juvenile flocks with the young from other broods (Rowley 1990).

Fledging, crèche distance and post-fledging survival of wild Galahs is well documented in rural areas but not in urban areas. This note from a longitudinal study, 2002 to present, of wild Galahs at Thornton (32°24'S 150°38'E), New South Wales, reports the distance from a nest box in our backyard to the 2025 crèche, and updates the findings of the 24-year study.

METHODS

The nest box is mounted 5.5 m above the ground on a steel pole. It is near a eucalypt (approximately 21 m tall) with an understorey that includes *Callistemon* spp., *Banksia* spp., *Grevillea* spp. and ferns under shade cloth. It has not been taken down for cleaning and refurbishment since the 2023 breeding season. Its custom-made camera is no longer working.

Photographs of the Galahs were taken with a Canon 5D Mark IV camera with an EF 100-400 mm F/4.5-5.6L IS lens (<https://www.canon.com.au>).

In this study, fledging is defined as a chick leaving the nest box permanently. For fledging competence, 'flew strongly away' is defined as: the chick dropped <2 m when it first leapt from the nest box, it gained altitude once flying and it maintained or increased altitude until out of sight. To determine the distance from our nest box to crèches used by our Galah families, I watched and followed chicks taking their first flight. The straight-line distance from the nest box to the crèche and the size of the crèche were calculated using the 'Measure distance' tool in Google Maps (<https://www.google.com/maps/>).

Over the duration of my long-term study, I recorded the times that Galah chicks fledged from the nest box. I converted these into time after sunrise or time before sunset using sunrise and sunset times obtained from an online geodetic calculator (Geoscience Australia 2025). I graphed fledging times using MS Excel (www.microsoft.com) and created box and whisker plots (box plots) to identify outliers. The quartiles were calculated using the inclusive function because the data sets were small ($n=20$, $n=8$). I then generated scatter plots excluding the outliers. The trend of fledging times over the period of the study was determined.

RESULTS

In August 2025, a pair of wild Galahs were observed bringing fresh eucalyptus leaves to, and marking (rubbing their face on) the nest box in our back yard, and I presumed they had laid eggs. A chick was first heard on Friday 19 September 2025.



Figure 1. For the first time in 24 breeding seasons (2002-2025), a fourth Galah chick, Chick 4/2025 shown in the nest box, fledged.

Four chicks fledged from a single nesting attempt (**Figure 1**). Each flew strongly away from the nest box over a period of 13 days; 31 October, and 3, 8 and 13 November. Each chick flew with its parents north over our house then the parents turned them north-west to a stand of eucalypts 250 m away and approximately 6500 m² in size. Each chick made

several attempts at landing, either overbalancing and attempting to land on a lower branch or circling the trees then making further landing attempts. This study has found that suitable suburban crèches contain tall eucalypts growing either in a line or irregular shape, or more widely spaced on parkland. At 06:15 on 13 November, five Galahs were sitting on a branch of a eucalypt in a residential backyard 150 m from the nest box (**Figure 2a**). Two Galahs (the parents) flew directly from the branch to the nest box, leaving three chicks (Chicks 1/2025, 2/2025 and 3/2025) in the tree (**Figure 2b**). Chick 4/2025 flew to the crèche at 10:53 on the same day. That afternoon, six Galahs flew past the eucalypt towards stands of trees 100-200 m south-west of the nest box.



Figure 2a. Galah parents (green arrows) sitting with recently fledged Chicks 1/2025, 2/2025 and 3/2025 (orange arrows) in a tree approximately 150 m from our yard.

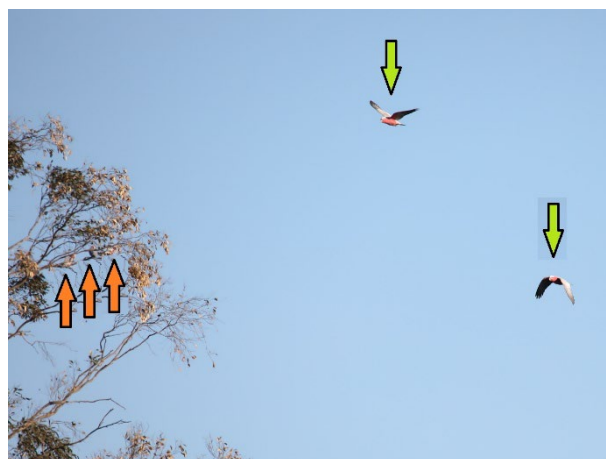


Figure 2b. Galah parents (green arrows) leaving Chicks 1/2025, 2/2025 and 3/2025 (orange arrows) in the tree and flying directly to Chick 4/2025 in a nest box in our back yard.

Over the period 2008-2025, 28 chicks were documented fledging. The ratio of morning-fledging to afternoon-fledging chicks was 5:2. Of the 20 morning-fledging chicks (71%), 17 (85%) fledged within 120 min of sunrise (Figure 3). The average fledging time was 77 min after sunrise. Eight chicks (29%) fledged in the late afternoon with six (75%) fledging within 120 min of sunset (Figure 4). The average fledging time was 89 min before sunset. None of 29 Galah chicks (28 with exact fledging times plus Chick 3/2023 which left sometime between 14:30 and 15:40) fledged between 10:53 and 14:10, a 197 min window in the middle of the day.

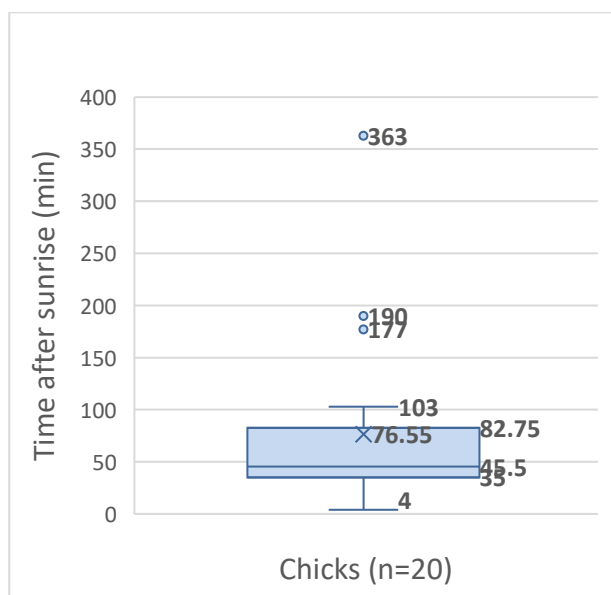


Figure 3. Box and whisker plot showing that 17/20 of morning-fledging chicks flew less than 120 min after sunrise. There were 3 outliers (177, 190 and 363 min after sunrise). The median was 45.5 min after sunrise and the mean was 76.55 min after sunrise.

There have been seven nesting attempts in which at least three chicks fledged. The fledging interval between Chick 1 and Chick 3 ranged from 0 to 15 days (average 5.4 days). On average, Chick 2 fledged 3 days after Chick 1 and Chick 3 fledged 2.4 days after Chick 2. In only one clutch did a fourth chick survive: Chick 4/2025, which fledged five days after Chick 3/2025.

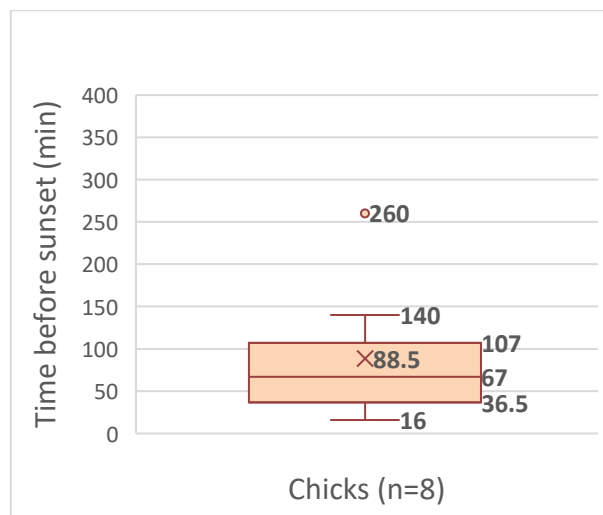


Figure 4. Box and whisker plot showing that 6/8 of afternoon-fledging chicks flew less than 120 min before sunset. There was one outlier. The median was 67 min before sunset and the mean was 88.5 min before sunset.

DISCUSSION

The 2025 breeding season was the first season in which a fourth chick in one of the nest boxes survived and flew strongly away. It was also the first season in which I was able to see every chick land after its first flight, identify the location of the crèche and confirm post-fledging survival of the first three chicks, at least until the fourth and last chick fledged.

The study shows it is possible for four healthy chicks to fledge from a nest box in a suburban backyard and it is possible for all of them to do so with strong sustained flight. These findings are promising because they suggest that Galahs breeding in nest boxes in suburban areas may have similar nesting success to Galahs breeding in tree hollows, as is the case for some other birds (Purcell *et al.* 1997).

A Galah crèche may be very close to the nest. In 2025, the chicks were guided to a crèche that was only 250 m from the nest box. This observation suggests that it is important, when erecting a nest box, to determine if there are stands of trees in a zone around the nest box that could serve as a crèche. The stands should be big enough to allow chicks to rest, to wait to be fed by their parents and to practise flying and landing. Ideally, potential crèches would be between 100 m and 2 km from the nest box and have minimal human disturbance.

A crèche location may be chosen because of its potential to provide benefits to both chicks and parents. As my study has shown, chicks on their first flight cover a longer distance than the straight-line distance between the nest and crèche. My observations are that they begin flying in the direction to which the nest box entrance hole faces and are then turned towards the crèche by the parents. The 2025 chicks unsuccessfully attempted to land several times. Some chicks, especially younger siblings, are weak fliers and may only be able to reach a crèche that is close by. Importantly, the parents save time and energy flying between the nest and crèche to care for the chicks until the last sibling leaves. If the crèche is close to the nest, parents at the crèche can communicate with chicks still in the nest. I could hear their calls clearly from a distance of 250 m.

Galahs breeding in our Thornton back yard have used different crèches in different years. The parents appear to pre-select a crèche because all the chicks begin flying east from the east-facing nest box entrance hole and then they are guided towards the crèche by their parents. In 2007, the parents guided the chicks through a sweeping turn then flew west until out of sight. I later discovered a crèche

containing several Galah families in a line of eucalypts behind a sporting oval approximately 250 m west of the nest box. However, I could not confirm that this was the crèche for the Galahs from our nest box. In 2017, the parents turned Chick 1/2017 to the south-west, and they all flew out of sight. It is possible that they landed in eucalypts approximately 100-200 m south-west of the nest box. In 2025, the parents guided the chicks through a sweeping turn then flew north-west to a stand of trees visible from our front yard.

It is not clear why different crèches are chosen in different years. The parents are not tagged and may be different pairs that are faithful to different crèches. Also, a pair may change to a different crèche if it is perceived to be safer. If the parents are later nesters or are raising a second brood after a failed first clutch or brood, they may decide to use a crèche already populated with other local broods.

The trend for chicks to fledge either within 120 minutes after sunrise (Figure 5) or within 120 min before sunset (Figure 6) (first documented in Pryor 2018) has remained unchanged for the duration of this study. These findings suggest that Galah parents prefer to escort their chicks to the crèche

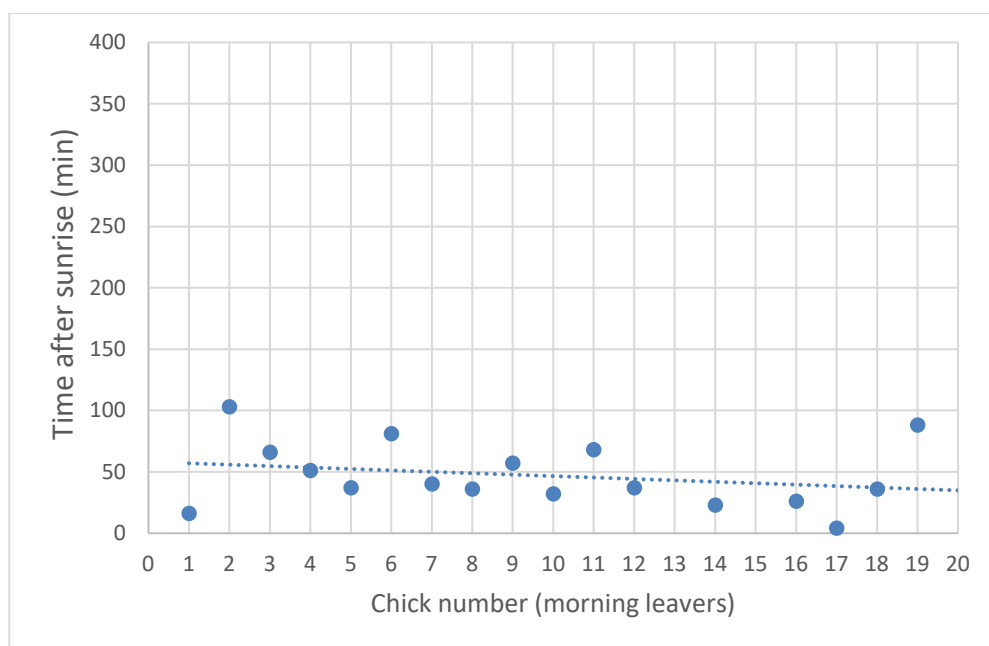


Figure 5. Scatter plot showing the number of minutes after sunrise that individual morning-fledging Galah chicks fledged (excluding outliers).

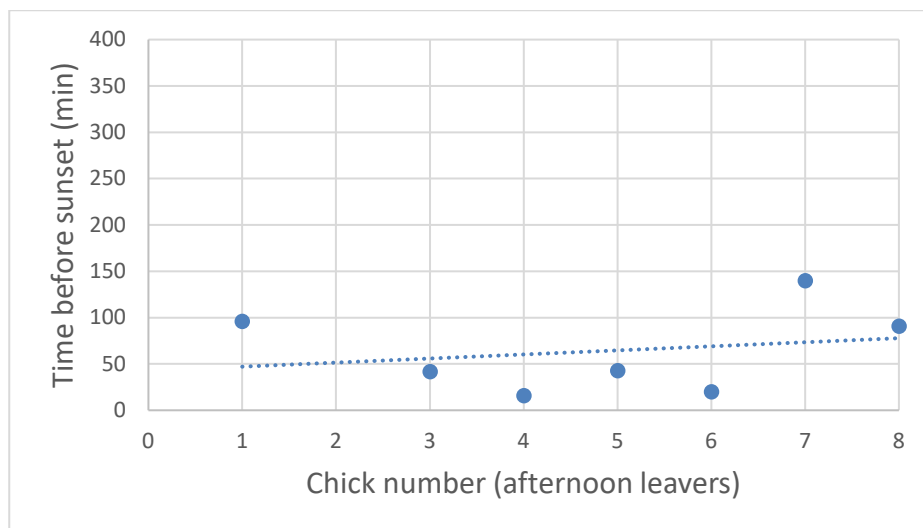


Figure 6. Scatter plot showing the number of minutes before sunset that individual afternoon-fledging Galah chicks fledged (excluding outliers).

during one of their main feeding sessions. This may allow them to feed their chicks more quickly and efficiently, especially if some chicks are in the nest and some are already in the crèche. The observations from 2025 further support the previous finding that Galah chicks do not fledge in the middle of the day. This appears to be because Galahs spend a long time resting during the hottest part of the day (Australian Museum 2026; Pidgeon 1970).

CONCLUSIONS

Under favourable conditions, four strong Galah chicks may fledge from a single clutch in a nest box in a suburban back yard. The older siblings may stay at a crèche that is very close to the nest until the last chick from the clutch fledges.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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