

Regular late afternoon assembly by a group of Gang-gang Cockatoo at Martinsville in April 2023

Graeme Stevens

Salamander Bay NSW 2317, Australia. gestev45@hotmail.com

Received 21 July 2023, accepted 7 August 2023, published online 31 August 2023.

This note describes the regular late afternoon assembly by a group of up to 25 Gang-gang Cockatoo *Callocephalon fimbriatum* during a period of fourteen days in April 2023, with associated notes on their movement and feeding behaviour.

OBSERVATIONS

On 18 April 2023, Mr Les Sharpe of Martinsville, on the eastern edge of the Watagans, informed me of a large gathering of Gang-gang Cockatoo having occurred that afternoon in tall eucalypts on the southern boundary of his property. He was initially seeking confirmation of their identity. He accurately described Gang-gang Cockatoo males and females, with accompanying photographs. His estimate was that 15-20 birds had been present.

The following day, Les Sharpe reported that at least 20 birds had again gathered at the site in the afternoon with some begging youngsters being fed.

On 20 April, I visited the property and watched with Les Sharpe at 4.10 pm as pairs and small parties of three and four Gang-gang Cockatoo began to arrive from various directions and their numbers gradually built up. It was initially difficult to get an exact count as birds were progressively arriving and those already present were moving around actively in the high canopy (with much calling).

At 4.45 pm there was a perceptible change in activity. Groups of five or more birds progressively gathered and moved off quietly, all heading in the same direction. This allowed an accurate count of 25 individuals to be made. All of the groups of cockatoos flew in a westerly direction towards the Watagans.

On 22 April, birds were again present and they followed a similar afternoon pattern every day throughout April, until 1 May when only a small group of four or five birds was present. On 23 April and some later dates, birds were recorded feeding

on mature seed capsules of Northern Grey Ironbark *Eucalyptus siderophloia* which was the dominant forest species in the assembly area. Birds also went down to drink at a small dam within the forested area.

LOCAL STATUS OF THE GANG-GANG COCKATOO

According to HANZAB (Higgins 1999), the Hunter Region is at the northern end of the species' range, with the normal limit being bounded by Munghorn Gap, Scone, Singleton and the Myall Lakes National Park. The Hunter Region Annual Bird Reports show that the Watagans and Laguna areas are the local stronghold for the species (Stuart 1994-2018; Williams 2019-2020).

In the breeding season, usually October to January but also recorded in late August and early September (Higgins 1999), Gang-gang Cockatoo are usually recorded as pairs and small family groups, but elsewhere within their range they are known to form larger flocks at other times of the year (Higgins 1999). Higgins noted non-breeding flocks of up to 60 birds, with one record of a winter flock of 150 birds in the ACT (Higgins 1999). The Hunter Region Annual Bird Reports (Stuart 1994-2018; Williams 2019-2020) have also recorded occasional large groups, with examples detailed in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Previous high counts of Gang-gang Cockatoo in the Hunter Region.

Date	Location	No. of birds
26 April 1997	Watagans	50
11 August 1998	Kurri Kurri	30
13-15 Oct 2000	Laguna	15
9-12 April 2004	Laguna	20
20 Nov 2004	Quorrobolong	16
20 April 2005	Watagan S.F.	18
14 Sept 2013	Watagans	20 approx.
21 May 2017	Laguna	20
2018	Pelton	18

DISCUSSION

HANZAB (Higgins 1999) indicates that movements by Gang-gang Cockatoo are not fully understood – for example there are seasonal altitudinal movements in some areas, generally in the southern parts of the range, but not in others, and abnormal movements have been recorded which are presumed to be in response to food availability, fires and droughts. Where flocks gather in larger numbers outside the breeding season it may be in response to prevailing conditions and food availability.

Consistent with the Martinsville observations are reports from near Geelong of groups of 15-20 Gang-gang Cockatoo sometimes observed moving to roosts at dusk during their autumn-winter influxes to the area (Dedman 1980). Also, at a separate location near Geelong in autumn, a group of nine birds was observed drinking at a pond in the late afternoon then flying to a group of tall eucalypts where they were assumed to roost (Higgins 1999). Near Bacchus Marsh a small family group of three birds also drank from a small pond before going to roost (Hewish 1986).

As with other areas of their range where there have been large assemblies of Gang-gang Cockatoo, most of the records for the Hunter Region have been one-off sightings or for unspecified periods of time, although two records from Laguna each spanned three to four days. The Martinsville records are the first local examples of an extended period of regular assembly prior to roosting and as such they are a further insight into Gang-gang Cockatoo behaviour.

HANZAB (Higgins 1999) states that Gang-gang Cockatoo form a monogamous pair bond but there seems to be a clear advantage in pairs and family groups assembling into a larger gathering before moving to roost, perhaps as a predator response.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank Les Sharpe for his detailed observations from Martinsville and Alan Stuart for assistance with extracts from the Hunter Region Annual Bird Reports.

REFERENCES

- Dedman, V. (1980). Gang-gangs in Geelong. *Geelong Naturalist* **17**: 19-21.
- Hewish, M. (1986). Records of Gang-gang Cockatoos in Bacchus Marsh in 1985/86. *Geelong Naturalist* **23**: 16-19.
- Higgins, P.J. (Ed.). (1999). 'Handbook of Australian, New Zealand & Antarctic Birds, Volume 4: Parrots to Dollarbird'. (Oxford University Press: Melbourne.)
- Stuart, A. (Ed.). (1994-2018). Hunter Region Annual Bird Reports (1993 – 2019). (Hunter Bird Observers Club: New Lambton, Australia.)
- Williams, D. (Ed.). (2019-2020). Hunter Region Annual Bird Reports (2018 – 2019). (Hunter Bird Observers Club: New Lambton, Australia.)