

# ABC NEWS

## Fireworks, gassing and gunshots: Controlling the carnage created by pest corellas in WA

ABC South West WA By Gian De Poloni

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PHOTO: White corellas are causing headaches for councils across Western Australia. (Supplied: Rod Squire)

**Fireworks, gassing and shooting at point-blank range — councils are resorting to extreme measures in a desperate bid to control destructive corella birds across Western Australia as numbers balloon to plague proportions.**

The white corellas are causing headaches for councils across the state, damaging infrastructure and causing a nuisance for residents.

Geraldton Mayor Shane Van Styn said the issue had reached boiling point in his town, with the council spending \$400,000 a year to fix damage caused by the birds.

"We're going to kill a few of these pesky little birds, and hopefully that sends a clear message to them to rack off," he said.

"They will be netted after being lured to the ground using wheat or any other nice snacks that they might like to consume, at which point they'll be rounded up and taken to a place to be humanely gassed."

Cr Van Styn said non-lethal scaring tactics used in the past had not been effective.

"They are growing in numbers. You see them everywhere. They just don't eat, they destroy. They need to go," he said.

In WA's south-west, the City of Bunbury has tried using loud pyrotechnic devices to scare away the local corella population, but found it just moves the problem elsewhere.

Environmental officer Colin Spencer said culling was the most effective way to control the populations.

"We attract birds to sites where we can establish a regular feeding pattern," he said.

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"Once we get enough birds in attendance, we use a net that goes over the top of them and they will be shot at point blank range with a low velocity rifle."

Mr Spencer said ratepayers frequently complained about the birds.

"The birds have destructive habits. They damage infrastructure, they chew stuff, they rip apart seals, water goes into houses, they cause electrical short circuits, trees are devoured — a whole range of things," he said.

"The hardest thing is when the birds start disrupting people's sleep."



**PHOTO:** Corellas are costing councils hundreds of thousands of dollars a year in damage bills. (ABC Open contributor Greg Sylvia)

## 'We need to nip it in the bud'

The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions issued permits to cull 2,000 corellas across the state last year.

But WA Local Government Association (WALGA) president Lynne Craigie said that was not nearly enough.

"In context, it isn't but a drop in the ocean," she said.

"Two thousand is only a very small sample of the numbers of corellas that are out there."

The State Government has spent \$50,000 in the past financial year to assist WALGA to form a coordinated corella management plan.

But Ms Craigie said there was no word on whether funding for the strategy would be renewed beyond the current financial year.

"We need that funding secured for several more years," she said.

"Certainly it's becoming unmanageable and if we're not careful, we'll have problems as we do with other pests, where it's too late to try and manage the problem.

"We need to nip it in the bud before it gets to that extent."



**PHOTO:** Flocks of corellas can cause damage to infrastructure. (ABC Open: Gemma Deavin)

## Legislation review could beef up control efforts

The department's assistant director of conservation Fran Stanley said it was considering reviewing legislative regulations to boost control methods for corellas and other pest species.

"The overall matter of controlling corellas across the state is something we're considering through the development of

regulation in the Biodiversity Conservation Act," she said.

"At this stage we're going to see how the current program goes this year, and we'll review whether further funding is required in future years."

Ms Stanley said many of the problem corellas were native, which made controlling them a complex issue for councils.

"It is difficult to tell the species apart. They all look relatively similar," she said.

"The ones we get in the Perth metropolitan area for example are not native to this area, but still they are protected as fauna under the Wildlife Conservation Act."

Mr Spencer has called on state politicians to take more of an interest in the matter, considering the amount of taxpayer money spent cleaning up after the birds.

"There needs to be more regionally coordinated help, direction, and research and development into the problem. We can't do it alone," he said.

"This could potentially effect economies, tourism, the whole lot. It's a really serious issue and the issue needs to be taken seriously by the state and everyone else."

**Topics:** regional, local-government, birds, pests, bunbury-6230, Geraldton-6530, perth-6000