

# Major Mitchell's cockatoo

*Lophochroa leadbeateri*

*Widyagala (Wiradjuri)*



Photo: Chris Tzaros

*The Major Mitchell's cockatoo is named after Major Sir Thomas Mitchell, who was a surveyor and explorer of Southeast Australia during the 1800s. The species name, leadbeateri, commemorates Benjamin Leadbeater (1760-1837), a London natural history merchant who supplied specimens to the British Museum.*

## Description

**Size:** At 35-40 cm in body length, the Major Mitchell's cockatoo is smaller than the sulphur-crested cockatoo, but slightly larger than a galah.

**Plumage:** They are the only Australian cockatoo that is salmon-pink below and white above and because of this colouring they are also known as the pink cockatoo. They have a prominent, large, white-tipped crest that is banded in red and gold.

**Eyes:** Males have brown eyes and females have red eyes.

**Call:** Its call is a distinctive stammering or wavering screech, 'ar-ai-ar-a-ar-iagh'.

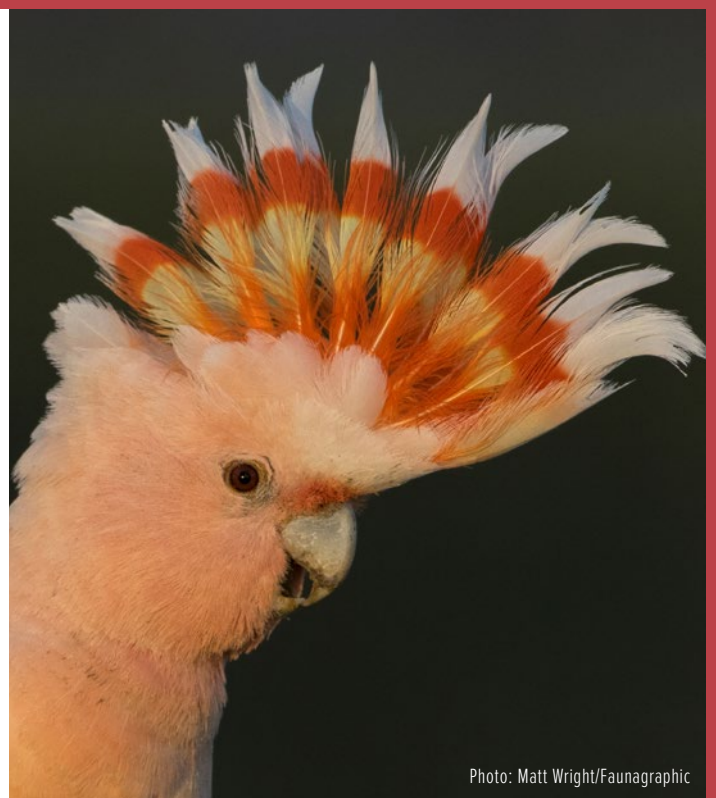


Photo: Matt Wright/Faunagraphic

## Habitat

Major Mitchell's cockatoos live in a wide range of treed and treeless inland habitats, including dry woodlands in arid and semi-arid areas. They can live in the same area all year round if there is sufficient water, but they can be partly nomadic in arid areas, as they move in response to the availability of food and water.

They require old trees which support hollows that are large enough to be suitable for nesting in and spaced are at least one kilometre apart, with no more than one pair every 30 square kilometres.

Major Mitchell's cockatoos are omnivorous, eating the seeds of grasses, shrubs and trees, as well as roots and bulbs, and insect larvae. They usually forage in small groups, often in the company of galahs or little corellas, though larger flocks occasionally form where food is abundant.

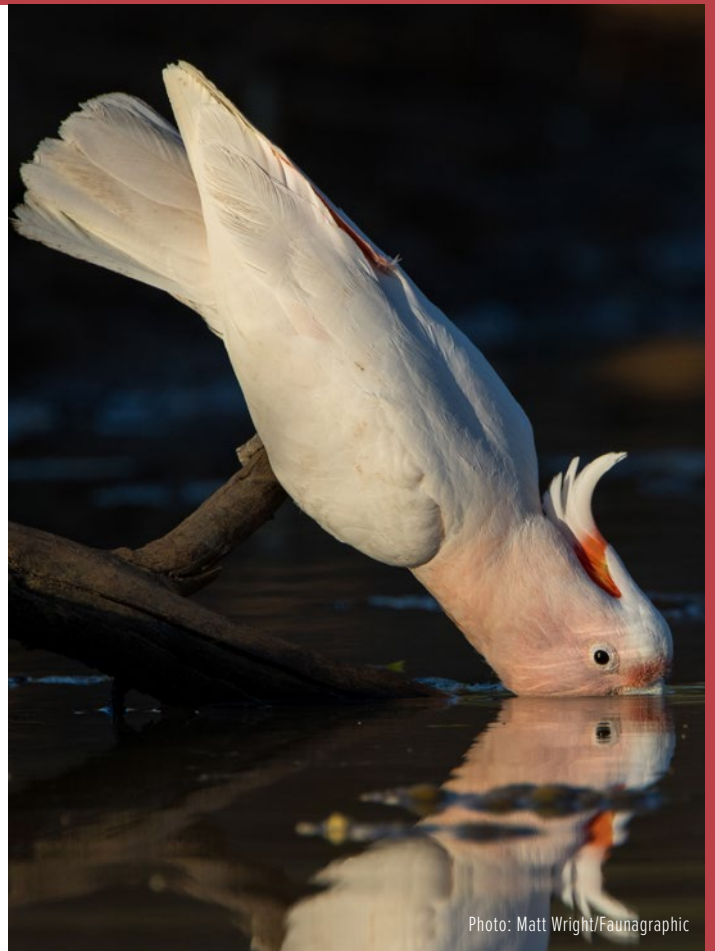


Photo: Matt Wright/Faunagraphic

*Major Mitchell's cockatoos feed on the seeds of native and exotic melons and on the seeds of species of saltbush, wattles and cypress pines.*



Photo: Chris Tzaros



Photo: Matt Wright/Faunagraphic

## Breeding

Major Mitchell's cockatoos nest in the large hollows that can be found in river red gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*), black box (*E. largiflorens*), coolibah (*E. microtheca*), or native pine (*Callitris* sp.).

A clutch of 3-4 eggs is laid in a large, vertical hollow on a bed of decayed wood, woodchips and bark. Both males and female will sit on the eggs while incubating them as well as feed and preen the chick once hatched.

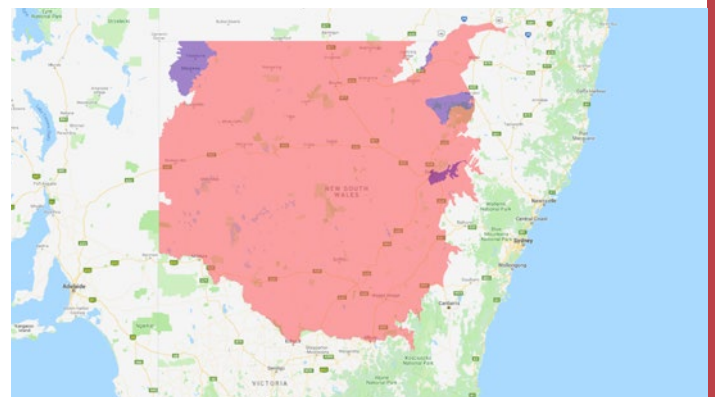
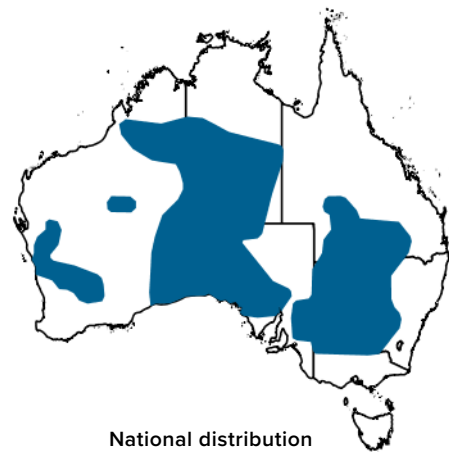
Young birds become independent from their parents when they are about 4 months old.

*Native pine trees are slow to grow and sensitive to hot fires. The reduction of large native pines caused by land clearing and too-frequent fires, limits tree hollows for nesting.*

## Distribution

Major Mitchell's cockatoos are found across the arid and semi-arid inland areas of Australia. Their distribution ranges from south-western Queensland south to north-west Victoria, through most of South Australia, north into the south-west Northern Territory and across to the west coast between Shark Bay and about Jurien.

In NSW, they are found regularly as far east as Bourke and Griffith, and sporadically further east beyond that.



NSW occurrence: Pink = Known, Purple = Predicted.  
(Office of Environment and Heritage)

## Conservation status

In NSW, the species is listed as Vulnerable.

## Threats

Some of the key threats to the species in NSW includes:

- Clearing of woodlands.
- Heavy grazing of feeding areas resulting in the removal of seeding grasses and preventing regeneration of food plants.
- Loss of existing and future hollow-bearing trees.
- Illegal nest-robbing and trapping.

## Activities to assist this species

- Manage grazing in feeding areas to prevent loss of food resources.
- Fence areas off habitat, exclude stock and control rabbits to assist regeneration of trees, shrubs and native grasses.
- Protect existing and future hollow-bearing trees for nest sites.
- Monitor known nesting sites to deter poachers.

### MAJOR MITCHELL'S COCKATOOS IN TERMINAL DECLINE IN VICTORIA

A little further south, in Victoria, the Major Mitchell's cockatoo is under massive decline. Read more about the problem and what's being done in this Australian Geographic article.

[www.australiangeographic.com.au/topics/wildlife/2018/03/major-mitchells-cockatoos-in-terminal-decline-in-victoria/](http://www.australiangeographic.com.au/topics/wildlife/2018/03/major-mitchells-cockatoos-in-terminal-decline-in-victoria/)

*Major Mitchell's cockatoos are a popular bird for the captive bird trade. This has led to illegal nest-robbing and trapping.*



Photo: Chris Tzaros