

Sulphur Crested Cockatoo

Cacatua galerita

What do they look like?

The Sulphur-crested Cockatoo is a large white parrot, measuring 45 to 50 cm. It has a dark grey-black bill, a distinctive sulphur-yellow crest and a yellow wash on the underside of the wings. Both sexes are similar, although the female can be separated at close range by its red-brown eye (darker brown in the male). Young Sulphur-crested Cockatoos resemble the adults.



Where do they live?



Sulphur-crested Cockatoos are common and familiar in Australia. Their range extends throughout the northern and eastern mainland, and Tasmania. Their popularity as a cage bird has also increased this range, as these birds either escape or are released deliberately in areas where they do not already occur.

Sulphur-crested Cockatoos are found in a variety of timbered habitats and are common around human settlements. The birds stay in the same area all year round.

What do they eat?

The Sulphur-crested Cockatoo's normal diet consists of berries, seeds, nuts and roots. Feeding normally takes place in small to large groups, with one or more members of the group watching for danger from a nearby perch.

When not feeding, birds bite off smaller branches and leaves from trees. These items are not eaten, however. The activity may help to keep the bill trimmed and from growing too large.

The species has become a pest around urban areas, where it uses its powerful bill to destroy timber decking and panelling on houses.



Breeding and Lifecycle

Sulphur-crested Cockatoos breed in August to January in the south of their range, and May to September in the north. The one to three eggs are laid in a suitable tree hollow, which is prepared by both sexes. Both birds also incubate and care for the chicks, which hatch after about 30 days. The chicks leave the nest after a further 60 to 70 days, but remain with the parents all year round. Family groups will stay together indefinitely.

Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease (PBFD)

Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, along with many other parrots, are susceptible to a widespread viral disease known as Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease (PBFD) or psittacine circovirus disease. It affects the immune system of the birds, often resulting in an AIDS-like condition. The keratin in the birds' bodies breaks down, causing deformed beaks and feathers, and feather loss. The disease is usually fatal, but infected birds may not display symptoms for many months or even years.

Infected birds can drop faeces, which contain the potentially infectious circovirus particles, into the environment to infect other birds. Unfortunately, there is a great potential for the virus to spread at places like feed stations. Clustering in large numbers, many birds may come into contact with contaminated perches and food dishes.

