

A large cosmopolitan family of often very colourful birds, but the NZ species are relatively drab, mainly green. All have a short bill with a horn covering (cere) enclosing the nostrils. The upper mandible is strongly curved, fitting neatly over the lower mandible. Their legs are short, and their feet have two toes pointing forward and two back.

SULPHUR-CRESTED COCKATOO *Cacatua galerita*

Uncommon Australian introduction

50 cm, 900 g. A large white parrot with a bright yellow crest; a yellow tinge on underwing and undertail; bill and legs grey-black. Female slightly larger. Flies strongly on broad rounded wings, screeching raucously. Often feeds on the ground. **Habitat:** Forest patches in open country, especially western Waikato and Turakina River. **Breeding:** Aug–Jan. [Sp 258]



SULPHUR-CRESTED COCKATOO



COCKATOOS and PARROTS

Cacatuidae and Psittacidae

About 330 species worldwide; 10 breed in New Zealand. Five are endemic to New Zealand, 1 is native and 4 have been introduced.

Parrots are well known for their colourful plumage and are widely held in captivity.

All have a large head and eyes, a short neck, and a short, deep bill. Mainly herbivorous, although some also eat invertebrates. The upper mandible of the bill is strongly curved, sharply pointed, and hinged at the base so that the parrot can crack nuts or other

unyielding food. Parrots can use their bill as an extra limb, showing great agility at climbing. They have a large fleshy cere, surrounding the nostrils. Two toes are pointed forwards and two back, giving a strong grip. Parrots can hold food while shredding it and pass it to their mouth. Most parrots are gregarious, and many have loud, harsh voices. They mostly lay white eggs in holes in trees or in crevices in rocks.

Reading: Forshaw, J.M. & Cooper, W.T. 1978. *Parrots of the World*. Melbourne: Lansdowne.

258. SULPHUR-CRESTED COCKATOO *Cacatua galerita* Plate 60

Other name: White Cockatoo

Size: 50 cm, 900 g

Distribution: Natural range is northern, eastern and southeastern Australia and Tasmania, New Guinea and adjacent islands. They were introduced to New Zealand in the early 1900s and have become well established in the Waitakere Ranges and in the western Waikato, in the Turakina River catchment and in the Kapiti Coast/Hutt Valley/Wainuiomata area of Wellington. Small groups have established at scattered sites from Northland to Canterbury, and single stragglers (perhaps even from Australia) or cage escapees have been recorded widely, including on the West Coast.

Population: Probably fewer than 1000 birds, the main sites are: northwestern Waikato

c. 300, Turakina c. 300, Wellington c. 50.

Breeding: Breed in hollow limbs and trunks of tall podocarps, usually above 20 m. The nest is a hollowed-out funnel lined with wood chips. Eggs are laid in August–November. They lay 1–2–3 white eggs (48 x 33 mm). Both sexes incubate for c. 30 days and brood the young, which fledge at c. 40 days old.

Behaviour: Gregarious when not breeding. Small, widely dispersed flocks and pairs gather into large flocks (up to 100+ birds) at winter communal roosts. In spring, these large flocks split up as pairs begin nesting and non-breeders resume a more nomadic lifestyle. Sulphur-crested Cockatoos remain alert and are hard to approach. Birds perched high in trees while the flock feeds on the ground or in neighbouring trees scream at the approach

of an intruder, and the whole flock flies up. **Feeding:** In New Zealand, they feed on the seeds of grasses, cereals and weeds (including thistles), fruit of podocarps, seeds of introduced conifers, walnuts, orchard fruit, and insect larvae dug out of rotting wood. Despite

occasionally feeding on grain crops, they do not seem to cause major damage, probably because their populations are kept in check by people trapping adults and collecting chicks for the cage-bird trade.