Corellas: prone to separation

A corella involved in one divorce may often be implicated in others: one female corella, labelled 08 in Dr Smith’s study population, had been mated with a male OA, for 3 years when, in 1979, she divorced OA. She divorced new mates in 1980 and 1981.

In 1980 another female, HH (who had been seen in the company of OA when she was a year old) paired with him but did not breed. The couple reared a single young the following year; then in 1982 HH died and OA paired (and bred) with a 3-year-old female, XX.

The rate of divorce is higher among couples breeding together for the first time, but there is no suggestion that breeding success or failure are factors in divorce.

On average, corella pairs produce only 1-2 young to independence per year and only half of them survive to 3 years of age. Pairs must breed for 5-13 years simply to reproduce themselves. However, corellas may continue to reproduce for 15 years or more (the species can live for 50 years in captivity), providing them with plenty of opportunities to replace breeding pairs and, indeed, to add to the size of the flock. Dr Smith’s research indicates that populations are increasing slowly, and that what may appear to be a high rate of divorce is, in fact, largely confined to birds attempting to breed for the first time.

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