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Key to improving cocky treatment and rehab

Tracking cockatoos using radio or satellite tracking presents a challenge to researchers, due to the difficulty of finding a transmitter that doesn't impair the birds' flight or survival, and that can withstand being nibbled by their very strong beaks.

Credit: Murdoch University

In Western Australia, a number of Carnaby's black cockatoos are released back into the wild each year after being treated for injuries from vehicles and shooters. Researchers such as Dr Anna Le Souëf, a Murdoch University PhD student and Perth Zoo vet, have been keen to find out how rehabilitated birds fare after release.

Dr Le Souëf is working with the state's Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo Project to trial different radio and satellite transmitter attachments on captive black cockatoos that could be used to track rehabilitated birds returned to the wild.

She says challenges associated with tracking wild parrots include the risk of damage to the transmitters by the birds' powerful beaks, and risks to animal survival due to transmitter snagging and impaired flight.

Murdoch researchers say the project offers a unique opportunity in Australia to access large numbers of wild black cockatoos, allowing use of radio-transmitters to collect previously unattainable demographic, health, movement, critical habitat and breeding data.