



Feeding native animals - information about feeding native Australian wildlife

In NSW no person is allowed to care for native animals without a licence from NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service. While anyone can rescue an animal, organisations such as WIRES and the Sydney Metropolitan Wildlife Rescue Service are trained to care for and feed native animals that are injured. Injured native animals normally need to be fed specialised foods until they recover.

Carers of native animals should NEVER allow themselves to become too attached to the animal in their care. This makes it easier for them to release the animal and lessens the chances of the animal becoming ‘humanised’ or close to human domestic habitation.

One of the strongest arguments against feeding native animals in the backyard is the danger to the native animals from domestic predators such as cats and dogs. If the native animal loses its natural instinct to survive, then they become easy prey.

Feeding birds around the house does neither the birds nor cats any favours, unless the birds are starving due to adverse climatic conditions. Bird feeders are irresistible magnets to some cats and even if they only watch proceedings from a distance, this may be sufficient to send cat haters into a frenzy. But a far bigger problem is that feeding native birds encourages the larger grain eating parrots, which soon displace most other species like the smaller honey eaters and insect eaters from the vicinity. Even worse is encouraging the large meat-eating birds like currawongs and kookaburras with handouts of mince and meat. Currawong’s with their melodious call have taken over completely in some urban areas. Not only do they viciously attack and drive away other smaller birds, but they raid nests and eat eggs and chicks. Other reasons wildlife experts discourage the feeding of native birds is that the birds become dependent on the easy handouts. The human hand outs are often not correct or balanced for the particular species of bird or animal.



Kookaburras

The two strongest arguments against feeding native animals is DEPENDENCY AND POOR NUTRITION.

Dependency – animals may become dependent upon artificial sources of food and become less inclined to forage naturally. This is still debated, as most birds retain their own feeding patterns, but if you are concerned, feed irregularly, do not give too much food and provide different kinds of food at various times.

Poor nutrition - many people do not provide appropriate food or sufficient variety to cover the bird and animals dietary needs. In the case of birds, parental birds may take poor foods back to the nest, which may affect the healthy development of young native birds.

Please note that in regard to feeding orphan joeys and young native mammals that cow's milk is really not appropriate and may lead to fatal diarrhea.

If you want to observe native Australian animals it is preferable to design a native garden that provides a variety of foods all year round. Such a garden provides shelter, water and nesting sites and should be safe from domestic pet attack. This is the best way to attract native wildlife to your own backyard garden.

An ideal habitat for local native wildlife will provide a safe natural home, safe natural food and clean, safe fresh water.

Basic requirements for a native garden include:

- A variety of pollen, seed, fruit and nectar-producing Australian native plants (hybrids do not produce pollen). Preferably those native to your locality so that the natural balance of wildlife species is not adversely affected. Ask your local native nursery for more advice.
- Dense shrubs and trees and spiky-leaved plants provide shelter for small birds at a range of heights. Native plants appeal to a range of species and include ground cover, such as leaf litter, rocks and plants for lizards and old trees for nesting sites.

If water and nesting places don't occur naturally, you might like to make a nesting box, water pond or birdbath. However these should be safe from predators like the neighbour's cat!

If you want to keep native animals in the garden, be aware of the chemicals you use around the yard. Many chemicals such as pesticides have adverse effects on wildlife. People often spray their gardens with insecticides and herbicides, as well as putting out snail and rat baits. All of these poisons can kill native animals:

- possums, birds and flying-foxes eat sprayed fruit, flowers and leaves
- insect-eating bats, birds and spiders can be affected by insecticides
- small native marsupials and possums can be killed by snail and rat baits
- native predators may also eat animals that have been poisoned. Many beneficial insects such as ladybirds which eat aphids can be killed by insecticides
- bird eggshells can be weakened by some pesticides so that the eggs are crushed before the baby birds have time to develop ie DDT products
- poisons can accumulate and become more concentrated in animals further up the food chain
- poisons can be washed through the soil into waterways and affect animals and their habitats further downstream – residues should not be flushed down the toilets or poured down the sink. Frogs are very vulnerable to poisons.

A healthy garden and good soil with a healthy balance of beneficial organisms like worms, mycorrhizas (fungi), insects and micro-organisms will produce strong, nutritious plants. Spiders, birds, frogs, reptiles and insectivorous bats all eat insects and other bugs that naturally thrive in your garden.

Suggested actions/solutions in your garden:

- encourage spiders, birds, reptiles and insectivorous bats which eat insects and other bugs
- build up a healthy soil with compost, mulches and earthworms
- control pests by preventative measures like soil drainage, water management, rotating crops, natural predators and companion planting. When necessary use bug traps, hand picking and organic sprays such as garlic and onions, liquid seaweed, pyrethrum, derris, milk or even a strong stream of water!
- contact your state waste management authority, Water Board or local council to take away old poisons from your home.
- Good luck with your environmentally sound garden project.

Our magazine, newsletters and other leaflets give many suggestions on how everyone can help. We have a website that is available for quick reference. If you are connected to the internet, please look us up at www.wpsa.org.au

Hundreds of years ago a wise person said "... nobody made a greater mistake than those who did nothing because a single person could do so little ...". It is the "little" work of thousands who care that has created the modern interest in conservation.



Crimson rosella