

Encouraging native birds

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Having birds flitting about your garden can be a wonderful sight, and they also play important roles in the local ecosystem. By meeting their habitat needs you will be rewarded with their presence and help play an important role in the conservation of our native birdlife.

Birds of South Australia

Adelaide is home to a wide variety of birds, including owls, spoonbills, falcons and button-quails. In fact, over 270 bird species have been recorded in the Adelaide region. Sixteen of these species are introduced.

Urban development has reduced the natural range of many birds originally found in this area, contributing to 76 of our local native species currently being threatened with extinction, either regionally or nationally.

Native birds you will commonly see around Adelaide include the Australian magpie, laughing kookaburra, and various species of honeyeater, rosella, lorikeet and larger parrots such as the galah and sulphur-crested cockatoo.

Threats

Many factors jeopardise Adelaide's native bird populations. Like other native wildlife, birds are facing increased pressure due to the clearance and alteration of remnant vegetation, urbanisation, predation by cats, spread of invasive weeds, and competition from both introduced species and overabundant native species, such as noisy miners.

Habitat loss and fragmentation due to vegetation clearance has resulted in reduced availability of food and nesting sites, and increased populations of those bird species that prosper in response to these altered conditions.

Birds such as the noisy miner aggressively exclude smaller native birds. It is one of a number of native species, known as 'increaser' birds, that have come to dominate the urban environment. They tend to occupy open spaces with tall trees and little or no understorey, a common landscape feature of urban areas.



Superb fairywrens need protection from predators and aggressors (Photo: Steve Walker).

Smaller birds such as wrens and finches require an understorey of shrubs for protection. They especially benefit from prickly bushes such as kangaroo thorn (*Acacia paradoxa*) which has dense prickly branches ideal for avoiding predators and aggressors.

The introduced starling also prefers an open understorey and can out-compete some native birds for nest space in hollows.

Control your domestic pets such as cats that prey on or deter birds from visiting your garden. Keep pets inside or construct an outside cat run to make your garden safer for wildlife.

Chemical use

Chemical use should be minimised. Insecticides are lethal to all insects and other invertebrates, reducing important food sources for many birds.

Habitat requirements

It is a misconception that large amounts of nectar producing plants are needed to attract birds. Too many of these types of plants will encourage the louder, aggressive, native birds such as New Holland honeyeaters and red wattlebirds, which deter smaller species.

Every bird species has specific diet requirements, so it is important to incorporate a variety of local native plants to provide an assortment of food types. Some birds are specialist nectar feeders, but they also eat insects.

Other common foods include native grass seeds, berries, small lizards, pollen and fruits.

A variety of local native plants with differing heights and structures will provide a habitat that more closely mimics natural ecosystems and will support a diverse range of species. If there are already many tall trees in your neighbourhood, you won't necessarily need one in your own yard.

Hollows provide important shelter and nesting habitat for many native birds, but it can take more than 80 years for natural hollows to develop in Australian trees. Clearance of older and remnant vegetation has led to a missing piece of the landscape. Bird species such as rosellas, lorikeets, pardalotes, and kookaburras are just some of the many native birds that rely on hollows for breeding.

Installing nest boxes is a good way to mimic natural hollows but retaining trees (both dead and alive) with hollows is always the best option. Hollows for smaller species such as pardalotes and tree martins are recommended as these species are often overlooked over the larger species.

Birds in Backyards (birdsinboxyards.net) has developed a series of nest box plans for a range of Australian birds.

Water and food

As tempting as it may be to provide food and water for your feathered friends, birds are really good at finding food and water sources in the landscape. So, birdbaths and feeders are not recommended.

In fact, birdbaths and feeders can increase the spread of diseases due to infected birds coming into contact with otherwise healthy birds.

The best way to feed birds that visit your garden is to create a thriving ecosystem supporting the plants, flowers, and insects they like to eat.

Wildlife friendly gardening

Gardening is a popular pastime, and what we do in our home gardens has the potential to benefit or harm the natural environment.

By developing and maintaining a garden that follows the 5 basic wildlife friendly gardening principles, you will reduce your maintenance costs, the threat of invasive environmental weeds, and contribute to a better local environment with habitat that helps to conserve our local flora and fauna.



Eastern spinebill (Photo: Martin Stokes).

Top 5 tips

1. Use plants native to your suburb.
2. Plant species that are a range of heights.
3. Use a mix of local native plants that fruit and flower throughout the year.
4. Manage your pets responsibly.
5. Minimise chemical use.

Together we can create a cooler, greener, wilder Adelaide.

Scan to discover a range of gardening resources, including a list of native plant nurseries, on the Green Adelaide website.



Contact us

Green Adelaide

T: (08) 7424 5760

E: DEW.Greenadelaide@sa.gov.au
greenadelaide.sa.gov.au