

*(Many of us do it! We put out seed and other food to attract birds to our gardens thinking we are helping them.... Well, read on and you may discover that your 'help' could be injurious to the many bird species we enjoy watching )*



## **FEEDING NATIVE WILDLIFE**

### **DID YOU KNOW?**

Lorikeets eat mainly nectar and pollen, with some soft fruit, berries and insects. **They are not seed eaters!** They have a brush-tipped tongue which is used to extract nectar from flowers. If they eat seed, this bristle can become damaged and they are unable to get nectar from native blossoms.

Seed causes vitamin deficiencies, and a disease known as Pbfd (psittacine beak and feather disease) which causes deformed beaks and feathers, feather loss and death.

Leaving seed out overnight attracts possums who love raiding bird feeders? Bird seed is very harmful to them, it will cause bloating making them very sick and can be fatal. Regular feeding can cut their life span down from 10-12 years to approximately half.

### **MINCED MEAT - A POOR SUBSTITUTE**

Another commonly-fed unnatural diet is minced meat, fed to the local kookaburras, magpies and butcherbirds. Bled meat contains too much phosphorous and too little calcium, producing nutritional imbalances and severe deficiencies, which can cause beak and bone deformity in these birds.

It is a poor substitute to the varied diets of insects, worms, mice and small mammals that these birds eat in the wild. Also, dropped pieces of meat around the house and yard attract ants, cockroaches and rats.

### **UPSETTING NATURE'S BALANCE**

Apart from the nutritional problems associated with people feeding wildlife, what about the damage we are doing to the balance of nature?

With a regular food supply, nomadic birds may breed out of season and cause local overpopulation. Feeding kookaburras and magpies deter small bird species. Migratory species like Currawongs do not move on and smaller species are preyed upon all year. Decline in smaller birds due to overcrowding of nest sites and competition for insects. By feeding birds it can also make them dependent on you and a nuisance to your neighbors, and if you go away or move house they may starve.

### **BIRD FEEDERS**

If you do put bird seed out it is suggested to have the feeder up high, never throw seed on or near the ground. It makes the birds easy prey for cats, dogs and hawks. It's very important to choose the correct seed - black sunflower seed and sunflower seed alone is very bad for any bird, it's very fatty and unhealthy for them. An appropriate seed is Small Parrot Mix available from local produce stores, and is a good mix of seed and grains. Only put out a small amount of seed out every few days, and wash the feeder after every use. Many bird disease are being spread through bird feeders. Personally, I don't think it is beneficial feeding any native wildlife, except in extreme conditions such as during drought or after fires. The best way to encourage native birds and animals to your yard is to plant native shrubs and trees, and these will provide a natural food source, not just nectar and pollen but insects, bees, wasps, spiders, etc. - all tasty little treats for our 'Insect and Meat Eaters' as well. Leave garden leaf litter to attract insects, vertebrates and lizards. Allow part of your garden to overgrow, to provide grass seeds and increased insect life to attract native animals, at the same time providing hidey-holes for them. Leave 'safe' dead trees, and hollowed limbs for nesting sites.

**Most important!** Provide clean water for drinking and bird baths. Try to provide water in varying depths, with protection from cats, and surrounded by plants of varying heights. More info. can be found at:

<http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/animals/KeepingWildlifeWild.htm>

[http://www.birdsqueensland.org.au/birds\\_in\\_gardens.php](http://www.birdsqueensland.org.au/birds_in_gardens.php)

<http://www.fourthcrossingwildlife.com/FeedingWildlife.htm>

<http://www.tvwc.org.au/help/article4/dont%20feed%20wildlife.pdf>

<http://www.sydneywildlife.org.au/FAQRetrieve.aspx?ID=41686>

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