

LIVING on the city's fringe, tucked between farmland and bush, you are presented with all kinds of challenges and responsibilities foreign to a city dweller. You also gain banal pleasure from things most city folk would consider dull. You begin to see the world through different glasses - sometimes bird-watching binoculars - and, if you immerse yourself in your different world, you develop a quirky love for things other folk find unpleasant (or don't notice at all).

While city dwellers might complain about dogs barking into the night and the squealing of speeding cars, some of us "fringe bushies" relate to friends - with red eyes - how the mating possums, frolicking under the bedroom window, kept us awake with their hissing and blood-curdling squeals.

And the motorbike frogs kept on changing gear but failed to ride away...

Frogs. Is there another category of creature that attracts such a mixed reception from people? Some love them. Some hate them. Some wouldn't mind if they disappeared off the planet forever ... The latter group of humans needn't worry. If we continue doing what we've done over the past 100 years, frogs will disappear. Some species have already become extinct - Queensland's Gastric Brooding Frog for one.

What I've come to realise is that many people misunderstand these amphibians and their important role in our world - even the people who quite like them. In my neck of the woods, near a brook and man-made lakes, I've been trying to encourage people to leave rushes and sedges growing near the water's edge for the native wildlife, including frogs. The more, the better. *But they are messy*, many say. *What about snakes? There's a bit over there, that's enough!*

FAUNA

FROG MATTERS

Louise Schofield

What many people don't seem to realise is that frogs - like many of our native creatures - need to move around to survive. Frogs don't always stay in or near bodies of water, nor do they stay in the same spot. Many dwell in trees or bushes and only travel to water for breeding. Others live under mulch and any debris lying around - a clean sweep of lawn provides no refuge.

Frogs need a variety of safe covers so they can move around to feed and find mates, otherwise they are easy prey for hunters (birds, animals and humans alike). They also need to be protected from the sun and dry winds, otherwise their skin dries and they die.

As well, frogs need the right vegetative environment to attract plenty of insects for their food sources. Many weeds and garden plants taking over our wetlands are poor habitat for frogs. *Watsonia* is choking waterways across WA and is very poor habitat indeed. *Pampas grass* is a curse.

What can you do about it? Just because you live in the suburbs, or in the middle of a paddock, doesn't mean you can't have frogs in your garden. You just need to provide a pool of water and surround it with a variety of insect-attracting and shady vegetation. Water plants will help keep your pond cool and clean. Choose types that don't multiply quickly.

A few fish help keep down mosquitoes until the tadpoles get to work, and if you choose Pigmy Perch and Western Minnow they won't eat your precious frogs' eggs either. Ponds can be made safe for young children with strong mesh, secured a few centimetres above the water level. If you can afford it, add a little fountain.

Old plastic shell pools for kids can be buried and turned into ponds (you were wondering what to do with them, weren't you?), but shallow ponds need plenty of shade and topping up in summer. Old car and truck tyres can be buried and lined with thick black plastic or special liners. Naturalise the edges with rocks or old bricks. Give your pond time, and the frogs will find you.

Even if you never build a pond, respect the wild look of nature and learn to like untamed bushland and riverine vegetation. Support local groups protecting these areas and you'll be rewarded with a world brimming with noisy frogs and other wonderful wildlife.

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*Secrets in the Tingle Forest and The Zoo Room (both with Fremantle Arts Centre Press) and has numerous books with educational publisher Thomson Learning Australia including Frogs: Friendly & Fascinating. (see review, p20)*

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