



Wild birds are sometimes fed by people or they scavenge food from bins and land fill sites. This behaviour can result in the attraction of excessive numbers of birds, leading to problems for the birds and people. By discouraging the feeding of birds, using bird-proof bins and good management at land fill sites, the numbers of birds can be reduced without the need to resort to culling.

Food Availability and Population Size

Young birds often perish in their first year of life, primarily because they lack the skills to locate sufficient food. In areas where a continuous supply of food is made available by humans, a high percentage of young birds can survive. Breeding birds may also be able to produce multiple clutches of eggs and young. Consequently, populations of birds like Silver Gulls *Larus novaehollandiae*, Australian Ravens *Corvus coronoides*, Australian Magpies *Gymnorhina tibicen*, feral and native waterfowl and feral doves and pigeons can increase over time in areas where food is abundant.

Problems Caused by Feeding Birds

- Harassment of people for food in recreation areas and schools.
- Excessive noise in residential and recreation areas.
- Water pollution resulting from large flocks feeding, resting and drinking in recreation areas. In late summer, the nutrients from faeces and left-over food produce ideal conditions for blue-green algae and botulism.
- Diseases may be carried by wild birds and there is a small chance that birds will transmit diseases and infections to humans from their contact with waste, people and food in recreation areas. Organisms such as *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* cause stomach upsets in humans and *Chlamydia psittaci* causes Psittacosis in humans and wild parrots and cockatoos.
- Loss of the young and eggs of native birds. Birds that congregate in large numbers can also crowd other bird species at breeding sites. For example, Silver Gulls crowd Crested Terns *Sterna bergii* at nesting sites on Penguin Island.
- The presence of birds nests and faecal material can result in corrosion and blocking of gutters and crevices on buildings. This can cause flooding of building interiors.

- Bird strike can result when large numbers of birds congregate at airports, endangering lives.
- Familiarity with people may result from feeding of native birds, increasing the chance of them falling victim to domestic pets and other predators.
- Interference with human activities may put birds at risk. For example, the Australian Pelican *Pelecanus conspicillatus* scavenges around fishing areas and can become caught up on fishing hooks or in fishing line.
- Reliance on humans for food may result in suffering or death if people become ill, go on holiday or move away.
- Highly processed foods meant for human consumption lack the balanced nutrition that birds require. Birds are often fed on bread, seed or sugar-water and these foods do not provide the birds with all their dietary needs. This can result in nutritional problems and the spread of disease between birds.
- Killing of birds by birds of prey like hawks and owls may result from the high population numbers. Some people may find the sight of birds of prey killing other animals disturbing.

Reducing Feeding of Wild Birds

Display signs and stickers advising on the benefits of using rubbish bins and the problems that can be caused by hand feeding birds in problem areas.

Discourage children from feeding birds at home and at school. School projects studying the effects of providing food for wild birds, or counting birds over time to record the downward trend in bird numbers, after cleaning up food scraps, can help educate children.

Never leave food for birds or other animals in natural habitats like national parks, even after fires or other natural disasters. The food may expose the animals to predators or may cause pest and weed problems.

Bins

- Provide bins that have lids or covers to deny birds access to food scraps (Figure 1). Many people are reluctant to use bins where there is a need to lift a lid. In this case, bins with a side-facing opening or a swing-top lid can be installed. Bins installed in public areas including restaurants, fast food

outlets, shopping centres, factories and food processing facilities, must enclose all rubbish.

- Empty bins regularly to prevent them overflowing onto the ground. If possible, rubbish should be wrapped or bagged before being placed in bins.



Figure 1 Bin in the City of Rockingham with a cover to prevent access by birds while allowing easy disposal of rubbish (Photo Tamra Chapman / DEC).

Land Fill Sites

- Prepare and implement management strategies to deny birds access to dumped food stuffs.
- Reduce the size of the tipping face to prevent access.
- Eliminate or cover standing water (which is attractive to gulls and waterbirds).
- Bury large loads of organic waste as soon as possible.

Attracting Birds Without Feeding

Habitat

Feed birds by growing suitable nectar-producing and insect-attracting plants. Even honeyeaters require insects in their diets to remain healthy. Choose plants native to the area and if possible try to re-create the plant communities that are endemic to the region. The more habitat types that can be created, the greater the variety of birds that will be attracted to the area.

Unhealthy birds at local wetlands may be a symptom of poor water conditions affecting the availability of natural foods. In this case, the wetland may benefit from rehabilitation actions which can be undertaken by local government and community groups.

Water

Provide water in a dish shallow enough to prevent birds and other animals from drowning. The water should be placed near plants that provide shelter and protection from predators, so the birds won't feel too exposed.

Pets

Keep pets that scare, harass or prey on birds inside, especially during in the early morning and evening; the peak foraging periods for birds.

Sugar-Water

Don't provide birds with sugar or honey in water. Although it provides an instant boost, sugar-water is very poor in nutrients. In addition, under the *Bee Keepers Act 1963* it is an offence to expose honey in such a manner that it may attract honeybees. This is because honeybees may spread exotic or endemic bee diseases to healthy hives, seriously impacting on the livelihood of beekeepers.

Caring for Sick or Injured Birds

It is important not to feed or give any liquid to a sick, injured or orphaned bird without first seeking advice. Feeding birds with the incorrect foods or using the incorrect methods of administration could result in its death.

Call the Department of Environment and Conservation Wildlife Carer's 24 hour hotline WildCare on 08 **9474 9055** or seek advice from a veterinarian.

Further Reading

- [Why You Should Not Feed Wild Animals](#). DEC, Western Australia.
- [WildCare Hotline](#). DEC, Western Australia.
- [How to Grow Native Plants](#). Wildflower Society of Western Australia.
- [Birds – Fauna Friendly Gardening](#). Swan Catchment Centre, Perth.
- [Wetlands](#) – Skills for Nature Conservation. Swan Catchment Centre, Perth.
- [Forests, Flames and Feathers](#). Birds Australia, Melbourne.

References

CALM (1993) Silver Gull Action Plan for the Perth Metropolitan Area. Conservation and Land Management, Perth.

Further Information

Contact your local office of the Department of Environment and Conservation.

See the Department's website for the latest information: www.naturebase.net.

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