

Birds in Your Garden

Are you seeing and hearing lots of birds in your garden? We have noticed a wonderful increase in numbers and species over the time we have been planting on our block. As gardeners, we can plan to improve the conditions for birds, providing food, water, and shelter for nesting and safe perching.

The first step is to observe which birds are around your place and to do a bit of research into which species are native to your area. Our garden has colonies of wrens, New Holland honey eaters, wattle birds, magpies, spotted pardelots kookaburras and willie wagtails. Crested pigeons, several raptors including wedge tailed eagles, sulphur crested cockatoos, corellas, galahs, crimson rosellas, Eastern rosellas and owls visit and pass through. Blackbirds, an introduced species, abound. Clearly a 'one size fits all' garden will not suffice.

Each species of bird has a different pattern of behaviour, which includes finding a favoured type of nesting site and food source. Birds can be seed eaters, nectar eaters, fruit eaters, insect eaters or meat eaters. In addition to the type of food, the way of getting a meal can also differ. One meat eater dives on prey while another scuffles in the undergrowth looking for worms and lizards. One insect eater catches its dinner on the wing while another seeks insects in trees and shrubs. One seed eater takes grass seeds at ground level while another cracks seeds and pods in bushes and trees.

Finding the perfect nesting site is vital to the successful raising of young. Birds can favour dense thickets, high branches, reeds or clumps of grass, the ground, and holes in trees or cliffs. Many birds readily nest around man-made structures. Birds also need to be able to find materials that are just right for their nest building.

A bird friendly garden provides a wide range of habitats, with a multi-layered planting of tall trees, shrubs and ground covers, some of which is planted closely to provide thickets of dense growth. Water is provided in shaded areas where predators cannot reach the birds. Nesting boxes can substitute for hollows in trees but make sure that you select the type of nesting box suited to the type of bird you want to house. Some birds will make your garden their base while others will visit. Think of your garden as contributing to a wider environment which provides for their needs. Both native and exotic plants can provide habitat for nesting and safety from predators.

Naturally native plants provide excellent food sources for native birds. Exotic plants can also provide food, as we have observed when three New Holland honey eaters were sipping nectar from one spire of salvia flowers in our nursery sales area. Corellas have stripped our trees of unripe apples, ripping them apart to reach the seeds within. The best way to feed birds is to plant for them.

Providing bird baths and ponds of different sizes and depths will cater for a range of users. Keep the water cool, clean the birdbath regularly, place it with nearby escape access to trees or shrubs and out of reach of predators, provide a branch or stone in deeper birdbaths for a small bird to use if they fall in, and include filling the birdbaths in your list of jobs for holiday house minders.

There is a great website called Birdlife Australia, which has a link to the website, Backyard Birds. I used Backyard Birds as a reference for this article. It includes a bird identification tool and is dedicated to conservation of native birds and their habitats and is well worth a visit.

Happy gardening, Christine and Keith Windle,
Garden Gate of Inverleigh Nursery, 0403 267 286 info@gardengatenursery.com.au
www.gardengate.com.au cnr Winchelsea Rd and McCallum Rd, Inverleigh, 3321