



# Encouraging Birds

## Backyards for Wildlife Fact Sheet

### South Australian Birds

Over 270 bird species have been recorded in the Adelaide region, of which 16 are introduced whilst 76 have conservation significance (meaning they are rare, endangered or threatened).

Factors such as urban development have either restricted or limited the natural range of many birds originally found in the Adelaide region. Adelaide was, and still is home to a wide variety of birds including owls, spoonbills, falcons and button-quails. These species are still around but your chance of seeing one is becoming increasingly less likely.

More typical birds of the Adelaide Park Lands and suburbs include the Australian Magpie, rosellas and lorikeets. By providing the correct habitat requirements for local birds you will be rewarded with their presence and will be helping to play an important role in the conservation of Adelaide's diminishing native birdlife.

### Habitat Requirements

Each bird species has specific diet requirements so it is important to incorporate a wide variety of local native plants that will provide an assortment of food sources. Some birds, such as honeyeaters are specialist nectar feeders, but they also eat insects. Other common food sources include grasses, berries, insects, small lizards, seeds, pollen, fruits and nectar. However, it is a misconception that large amounts of nectar producing plants are needed to attract birds; too many will encourage aggressive birds such as New Holland honeyeaters and wattlebirds which deter smaller species.

A variety of plants with differing structures will ensure that all their habitat requirements are met. If possible, include thick, prickly shrubs such as Kangaroo thorn (*Acacia paradoxa*) or *Hakea* species where birds can nest and seek shelter.

Hollows provide important habitat for many native birds for shelter and nesting. It can take 80+ years for hollows to develop in trees, and therefore, clearance of older and remnant vegetation has led to a missing link in habitat. Bird species such as Eastern Rosellas, Crimson Rosellas, Rainbow Lorikeets, Pardalotes and Kookaburras are just a few of the native birds that rely on hollows for breeding.



Superb Blue fairy-wrens are a real treat to see in urban gardens. Try to plant some dense vegetation, like the Kangaroo Thorn (*Acacia paradoxa*) for them to live in.

### Threats

Many factors jeopardise Adelaide's native bird populations. Birds, like other native wildlife, are facing increased pressure due to a number of factors including the clearance and alteration of remnant vegetation, higher density housing, predation by cats and competition from introduced species.

Land clearance has resulted in the loss and fragmentation of native vegetation and is the primary threat to native fauna. The decline of approximately two-thirds of all threatened Australian birds is predominately attributed to habitat loss and fragmentation as a result of vegetation clearance. This results in reduced availability of resources, and increased populations of exotic birds that prosper in response to altered conditions.

Birds such as the Noisy Miner aggressively exclude smaller native birds. Noisy Miners are one of a number of native species that have come to dominate many areas due to their suitability to altered conditions. They dominate more open spaces with little or no understorey, which would normally provide cover for smaller birds. Starlings, an introduced species, also prefer an open understorey and out-compete native birds for nest space in hollows.

## Water

Water is an essential element and will encourage birds to visit your garden, especially during the warmer months when it is scarce. Water can be added to your garden by making a pond or getting a birdbath. In both instances it should be situated close to prickly or thorny shrubs and trees so the visiting birds are able to quickly seek shelter from predators. Ensure that the water is kept clean and topped up regularly to ensure a reliable source is provided.

## Chemical Use

Minimise use of any herbicides or pesticides as the latter are lethal to all insects which are food for many birds. Also avoid using chemicals around your pond or in boggy areas as they can contaminate the water.

## What Can You Do?

Planting locally native species will encourage local birds to visit your garden. Ideally, your garden should include the following:

- Low, medium and high trees and shrubs that will offer protection from predators and domestic pets. Try to include at least one very tall tree to act as a survey or lookout point for native birds.
- Plant a range of natives that flower and fruit during different seasons. Winter-flowering plants are often forgotten in gardens, so grow banksias, hakeas and grevilleas in addition to summer and spring flowering natives. Don't forget the seed eaters, which rely on grasses and sedges. Fruits and berries are also important, so incorporate a mix of food plants in your garden today!
- Nesting boxes can help recreate homes for some hollow nesting birds. However, it is recommended that you keep an eye on them to ensure that invasive species such as starlings, sparrows, feral wasps and honeybees have not taken residence. You should set it up so you have convenient regular access (with a ladder) between 4-8m high.
- Control your domestic pets such as cats that prey on or deter birds from visiting your garden. Constructing an outside run for cats in the garden is safer for both cats and wildlife.



Backyards for Wildlife is managed by the SA Department of Environment and Natural Resources, with support from the Adelaide & Mount Lofty Ranges Natural Resources Management Board and the Australian Government



Red-browed finches occur in flocks and rely on insects as well as seeds from grasses and sedges for food. (photo: Dragos Moise)

## Why a Backyard for Wildlife?

In Australia, gardening has been recognised as one of our favourite pastimes and what we do in our home gardens has the potential to benefit or harm the natural environment.

By choosing to develop and maintain a garden that follows the five basic Backyards for Wildlife principles (see below), you can help contribute to a better local environment while at the same time conserve our local flora and fauna, create important habitat, reduce your maintenance costs, and reduce the threat of invasive environmental weeds.

### Backyards for Wildlife principles:

1. USE LOCALLY NATIVE PLANTS.
2. USE PLANTS THAT ARE A RANGE OF HEIGHTS.
3. PROVIDE FLOWERS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR.
4. MANAGE YOUR PETS RESPONSIBLY.
5. MINIMISE CHEMICAL USE.

Please consider applying some of these principles to your own backyard, so that together we can all help grow a great living environment for Adelaide.

## Find Out More

Visit [www.backyards4wildlife.com.au](http://www.backyards4wildlife.com.au) to access more Backyards for Wildlife and biodiversity information including an interactive map with lists of what grew in your suburb prior to 1836, a plant database and contact details for specialist native plant nurseries.

## For further Information Contact

Urban Biodiversity Unit, Department of Environment and Natural Resources  
Wittunga House, 328 Shepherds Hill Road, Blackwood SA 5051  
Telephone: (08) 8278 0600 Facsimile (08) 8278 0619  
Web Site: [www.backyards4wildlife.com.au](http://www.backyards4wildlife.com.au)

