



Nesting Boxes

Backyards for Wildlife Fact Sheet

Nesting Boxes as Artificial Hollows

The clearing of Adelaide's original bushland has resulted in the loss of natural nesting hollows in old trees. More recently, the removal of dead trees and limbs for firewood has further contributed to the decline in suitable hollows. This has impacted upon the many bird and mammal species that rely on hollows for nesting and shelter – and Australian wildlife has the highest rate of hollow dependency in the world.

There is currently a great shortage of natural nesting hollows, with no likelihood of new ones being created due to the long time frame (80+ years!) required for even small hollows to form. It is therefore imperative that we conserve existing hollows be they in living or dead trees.

We can also mimic natural hollows by installing nesting boxes to help provide homes for birds, bats and possums. By supplementing naturally occurring hollows with wildlife boxes, providing native food plants and retaining vegetation corridors you are sustainably supporting these extraordinary suburban neighbours.

Threats

A number of pressures threaten the availability of nesting hollows. The primary threat is habitat loss through urban development. A trend toward manicured gardens and cleared spaces has led to a decrease in the availability of mature eucalypts capable of supporting multiple natural hollows. It can take upwards of 300 years for a natural hollow to form to the size a Brushtail Possum or a cockatoo might be able to utilise.

Natural Hollows

For a nesting box to recreate habitat for possums, birds and bats, we must understand the natural attributes of tree hollows. In the summer, hollows have their own natural air-conditioning, provided as live trees transpire. In winter it is also considerably warmer within a natural hollow compared to ambient temperature.



We can mimic natural hollows by installing nesting boxes

Possum Boxes

Both local species of possum may use nest boxes. The smaller Common Ringtail Possum tends to make a drey or leaf nest in the branches of trees, but will utilise hollows during the wetter periods of winter and spring. The larger Brushtail Possum is an obligate hollow user, meaning they seek out a hollow or suitable location to shelter by day, every morning before dawn. Nesting boxes are readily utilised by this species and provide appropriate shelter, thereby minimising the risk of one taking up residence in your roof.

Bird Boxes

The size of your bird box and its entry hole will depend on the species you want to attract. Vertical hollow nesting birds include rosellas, red-rumps and many parrots; whereas some pardalotes, ducks and kookaburras prefer hollows on the horizontal.

Bat Roosting Box

There are nine bat species within the Adelaide metro area which can use the boxes during the day and during the winter months when they hibernate. Bats boxes are designed with a landing pad at the bottom of the box so they can crawl up inside.

Installing Nesting Boxes

When installing a nest box remember to locate it high enough to avoid threats from dogs, cats, rats and foxes (4-8m), but still at a height where the box can be maintained. The box entrance needs to face away from the hot westerly sun, and also positioned to avoid the wettest winds (in Adelaide orientating it from a north-easterly to southerly direction is preferable). Positioning an artificial hollow under a leafy canopy will also provide natural shade.

Maintaining Nesting Boxes

It is important to remember that nesting boxes for all native species require some management. This means removing the eggs and nestlings of introduced bird species (e.g. Common Starlings or Sparrows) as well as destroying and removing feral Honeybees which may take up residence. You must have convenient access to the nest box with a ladder and it would also be advantageous if you were aware of which creatures are using the nesting box for what purposes.

Complementary Planting

Ensure that large remnant trees on your property are a lasting feature in your backyard, as they provide important hollows for our wildlife. Planting locally native, dense prickly shrubs as under-storey around trees with hollows can deter predators. Locally native flowers, native grasses and provenance plants that have fruits and berries are also important food sources not just for the animals using your nest boxes, but many other local species as well.

Where can I get nest box construction information?

A couple of books exist which provide dimensions, drawings and details of nest box construction for Australian native wildlife. See *Nest boxes for wildlife – a practical guide* (2004) by Alan & Stacey Franks or *The Nest-Box Book* (2008) by the Gould League.

Nest boxes can also be purchased locally from fauNature at www.fauNature.com or Fauna Rescue at www.fauNaturescue.org.au. Alternatively, search the web for other designs across Australia.



A wildlife nesting box in a tree, occupied by Gould's Wattled Bats. (Photo: Terry Reardon)

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 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.



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

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

