

FEEDING WILDLIFE

The issue of whether or not to feed wildlife has been debated for many years and has recently come to prominence after a well known personality advocated the practice during a national television interview.

There are arguments both for and against feeding of wildlife. It is because of the complex nature of the argument that the debate has gone on for so long and is, to date, still unresolved.

On the one hand....

It is undeniable that man has been responsible for changing the natural environment. We have caused an imbalance in the mix of species, altered the

availability of food and changed the survival rate of many species. These changes are most noticeable in urban and semi-urban areas and it is in the towns and cities that well meaning people are more likely to feed wildlife. Many people like to attract wildlife to their gardens. This is an admirable quality and improves wildlife awareness within the community. It can also be argued that the natural food sources for these animals have been destroyed and therefore we should assist them by hand feeding. In times of drought or harsh weather, feeding local wildlife can give them a helping hand through hard times.

On the other hand....

Suburban gardens have an over abundance of flowering and fruiting plants, open compost heaps and garbage bins that favor certain species over others. People naturally prefer some species over others. Many people are inclined to feed birds, possums, wallabies and kangaroos but it is very rare to find anyone feeding snakes, goannas, flying foxes and insects. The result is that by hand feeding selected species we are decreasing biodiversity and further upsetting the already fragile and disrupted food chain. The dietary requirements of our native fauna are extremely complex. Even experienced wildlife carers have difficulty providing the correct diet for sick, injured or orphaned wildlife.

Most people don't live in the same house all of their life. An established community of wildlife dependent on hand feeding may not find subsequent occupants of the household to be as forthcoming with their handouts, or as responsible with restraint of cats and dogs. Attracting more wildlife to an area may simply serve to provide more easy prey for marauding suburban cats and dogs.



Effects of feeding wildlife unnatural foods

Meat eating birds such as kookaburras and magpies

The natural diet of these birds includes the feathers, fur, bones and stomach contents of their prey. Feeding them chopped meat which is low in calcium causes nutritional imbalances that can result in bone and feather deformities.

By providing a regular food source, you may encourage over population of these species which will deter smaller native birds visiting your garden.

Seed eating birds such as parrots and cockatoos

Bread, introduced fruits and seed mixes are not a natural food source for these types of birds. They can result in bacterial or yeast infections. The overabundance of "tasty" sunflower seeds can cause fatty tumors and feather loss. Diseases such as Pbfd (psittacine beak & feather disease) are easily spread through communal feeding trays.

Nectar eating birds such as lorikeets and honeyeaters.

The digestive system of these birds is designed for a predominantly liquid intake. Bread, seed mixes and soft fruit slow the digestion leading to vitamin and mineral deficiencies. This predisposes the birds to bacterial and yeast infections of the crop.

Water birds such as ducks and geese

Feeding bread to water birds does not provide a correct nutritional balance. This can cause such problems as weak egg shells. Uneaten food decays in ponds increasing the levels of bacteria, algae and nitrogen with detrimental effects to the entire water community.

Possums

Feeding fruit and bread to possums does not provide a correct nutritional balance. It can encourage them to raid compost and garbage bins in search of “junk food” making them easy prey to cats and dogs. Introduced fruits are not properly digested by Ringtail Possums and can cause bloating and death.

Kangaroos and Wallabies

In the wild, kangaroos and wallabies eat large amounts of native, leaves, twigs and shoots. Human food is a poor substitute with little nutritional value.

Milk aggravates the gut causing diarrhea. Bread sticks in the gums and can increase the likelihood of “lumpy jaw” which causes a slow and painful death.

Enjoy your wildlife without feeding it

- Leave leaf litter in your garden as it will attract insects, vertebrates and lizards.
- Leave ‘safe’ dead trees and hollowed limbs of live trees to provide nest sites for birds, possums, gliders and bats.
- Plant trees that naturally occur in your area.
- Provide water in varying depths with protection from marauding cats. If possible, cover your compost heap to prevent possums from scavenging for easy pickings.

Need more information? Contact us by email.

<p>Rosella Cockatoos Galahs</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Bread ➤ Fruit ➤ Food Scraps ➤ Seed mixes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Bread has a poor nutritional balance for most birds - it does not provide the complex cereal base they require. ➤ Introduced fruit is not a natural part of their diet and if it is 'going off' it can ferment in the crop causing bacterial or yeast infections. ➤ Seed mixes are rarely nutritionally balanced and many are difficult to eat, even these larger birds can't crack some of the seeds, encouraging them to rely on the oilier seeds (sunflower) which can lead to long-term fatty growths and obesity. ➤ Encourages population that would normally be nomadic to become sedentary, thus not balancing their diet. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Native grasses & seeds ➤ Large variety of insects and their larvae ➤ Hardened fruits like gum nuts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ ➤ ➤ ➤
<p>Lorikeets Honeyeaters</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Sugar & Water ➤ Honey & Water ➤ Bread ➤ Non-native fruits ➤ Seed mixes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The digestive system of these birds is designed for a predominantly liquid intake. Bread, seed mixes and fruit quickly fill the bird and slow the digestion process leading to vitamin and mineral deficiencies predisposing the birds to disease through bacterial and yeast infections of the crop. ➤ Diseases such as psitticine (beak & feather) disease are easily spread through communal feeding trays. ➤ With a regular food supply, nomadic birds will breed out of season thus becoming sedentary, creating localised over population, leading to further disease. ➤ Causes a decline in smaller birds through overcrowding of nesting sights and competition for insects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Nectar & Pollen from eucalypt & other native flowers ➤ Native Berries & Blossoms ➤ Insects & their larvae 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ ➤ ➤ ➤

<p>Ducks</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Bread ➤ Chips ➤ Vegetable scraps ➤ Leftovers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ These foods do not provide the correct nutritional balance causing deficiencies and predisposing them to disease etc. For example, a reduction in calcium levels can cause weaker egg shells. ➤ Bread can ferment in the gut causing bacterial infections. ➤ Food settles on the bottom of ponds and rots causing levels of bacteria to rise causes things such as botulism which can kill the ducks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Plants growing along the waters edge, as well as in the water ➤ Shrimps and Mussels ➤ Small Aquatic Animals ➤ Insects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ ➤ ➤
<p>Possums</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Bread ➤ Fruit ➤ Food Scraps ➤ Milk (cow, goat, soy, etc) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Fruits are not digested easily by Ringtail Possums, it ferments in the gut and produces vast quantities of gas - death is usually the end result. ➤ If fed milk, it aggravates their digestive system causing diarrhoea and dehydration which can result in death. ➤ Feeding non-native foods encourages them to 'experiment', including eating the poisonous snail pellets in your garden. ➤ Introducing a new food source ultimately reduces the possums territories creating overpopulation of areas, predisposing them to disease. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Variety of leaves, eucalypt trees being the favourite for both the leaves and flowers ➤ Native fruits and buds ➤ Bark ➤ Grass ➤ Occasionally Small Insects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ ➤ ➤ ➤
<p>Kangaroos</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Bread ➤ Leftovers ➤ Milk (cow, goat, soy, etc) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Kangaroos are designed to eat large amounts of low protein roughage such as native grasses and browse (leaves, twigs and shoots). Human food is a poor substitute with little nutritional value and will disrupt their natural intake. ➤ If fed milk, the gut becomes aggravated causing diarrhea & dehydration that can result in death. ➤ Bread is a soft food and if eaten regularly it can result in gum problems. ➤ Once this occurs, it only takes a hardened grain or twig to puncture the gum allowing the disease 'lumpy jaw' to infect the gum area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Kangaroos – predominantly grasses ➤ Wallaroos/ Wallaby's grasses, browse & shrubs ➤ Smaller macropods - fungus, browse & insects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ ➤ ➤