

Please Don't Feed the Wildlife

This wildlife friendly information is sourced from members of Tweed Valley Wildlife Carers, members of other groups, independent advice, and research. We hope you find the information below useful, and it helps to answer your questions on this subject. If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact us by clicking this link: <http://www.tvwc.org.au/contact.php>

As wildlife rehabilitators, TVWC members often come across well-intentioned people who, because of their appreciation of and the pleasure they get from our native wildlife, feed the wildlife that visits their properties.

Most people are not aware, however, that by feeding native wildlife we could be causing damage to our fragile environment.

Firstly, we cannot meet the complex nutritional requirements of our native animals. Even experienced wildlife carers can have difficulty establishing the correct diets when caring for sick, injured or orphaned wildlife.

Bread – a no no!

Consider the damage done by feeding processed or unnatural foods to animals, the most common being bread.

Bread has poor nutritional value, causing deficiencies and predisposing our wildlife to disease and deformities. For example, in the lakes around Banora Point, residents and walkers are often seen feeding bread to the ducks and swans. As a result, we have seen cygnets with badly-deformed legs, caused by a deficiency in calcium.

In addition, the reduction in calcium levels can cause weaker egg shells and therefore the fertility rates of birds are affected.

A more indirect problem caused by feeding bread to ducks and other birds in our waterways is a rise in the levels of bacteria in the water, as the bread and other uneaten foods settle on the bottom of ponds and rot.

Botulism is a disease that may then be contracted by the ducks and other bird life. It can be fatal to the birds.

Also, bread can ferment in the gut of our other native animals, causing bacterial infections, as well as causing gum infections, such as lumpy jaw in wallabies and kangaroos. It is not even suitable for grain-eating animals such as parrots which require a more complex cereal base.

Don't feed wildbird seed

Many people have a bird feeder in their garden, filled with bird seed, usually commercial wildbird seed mixes. Unfortunately, these are rarely nutritionally balanced and are difficult to eat, encouraging birds to rely on the oilier seeds such as sunflower. The result can be long-term fatty growths and obesity.

Many of the birds we try to attract to the bird seed are not even seed eaters, eg lorikeets which are honeyeaters. Their digestive systems are designed for liquid intake and solid foods may actually cause damage to their sensitive tongues with which they collect nectar.

Of major concern also is that these communal feeding trays can be responsible for the spread of disease. One of these, Psitticine Beak and Feather disease, inflicts our Australian parrots, the very birds we are attracting with our seed feeders.



These Wood ducks, being hand-raised by a TVWC carer, are being fed natural diets – grass, seed, greens and insects – and never bread!

Minced meat – a poor substitute

Another commonly-fed unnatural diet is minced meat, fed to the local kookaburras, magpies and butcherbirds. Bled meat contains too much phosphorous and too little calcium, producing nutritional imbalances and severe deficiencies, which can cause beak and bone deformity in these birds.

It is a poor substitute to the varied diets of insects, worms, mice and small mammals that these birds eat in the wild.

Upsetting Nature's balance

Apart from the nutritional problems associated with people feeding wildlife, what about the damage we are doing to the balance of nature?

With a regular food supply, nomadic birds become sedentary, the amount of exercise they get being reduced and the variety of their diet decreasing. As a result, nomadic birds may breed out of season and cause localised over-population.

Feeding kookaburras and magpies deters smaller birds. Worse, smaller species are preyed upon all year round, when migratory species like Currawongs do not move on. Also, a decline in smaller birds is caused through overcrowding of nesting sites and competition for insects.

Feeding wildlife can cause the animals to become aggressive. Tweed Valley Wildlife Carers receives many calls from members of the public about such behaviour. For example, Water Dragons that might have been small and cute when the feeding began are, as adults, boldly stalking the householders. Other cases involve Brush Turkeys, and even Lace Monitors or Goannas, that have come to expect their daily feed.

Becoming dependant upon humans for food, there is also the fear that the native animals will lose the ability to forage and find food themselves.

Encourage wildlife without feeding

To encourage wildlife on your property:

- Keep cats inside at all times and dogs enclosed.
- Provide a balance of vegetation, planting indigenous species, avoiding hybrid natives.
- Leave garden leaf litter to attract insects, vertebrates and lizards.
- Allow part of your garden to overgrow, to provide grass seeds and increased insect life to attract native animals, at the same time providing hidey-holes for them.
- Leave 'safe' dead trees, and hollowed limbs for nesting sites.
- Provide water in varying depths, with protection from cats and surrounded by plants of varying heights.