

Wildlife Friendly Fruit Netting

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>

Wildlife-friendly Fruit Netting

It is not uncommon, as you drive around the Tweed, to see netting loosely draped over a fruit tree, ostensibly to protect the fruit from birds and flying-foxes. Unfortunately, most of the netting of backyard fruit trees is potentially harmful to our native animals.

Tweed Valley Wildlife Carers and other wildlife rescue groups receive many calls, especially in the summer, to rescue animals entangled in fruit netting, including flying-foxes, various species of birds, gliders and reptiles. Sometimes the animal is already dead when a rescuer arrives. Often, the injuries sustained by the animal are such that it cannot be saved, especially after the animal has struggled sometimes for hours or even days to free itself. Those that can be treated may have to spend months in care until their injuries heal and they can be returned to the wild.

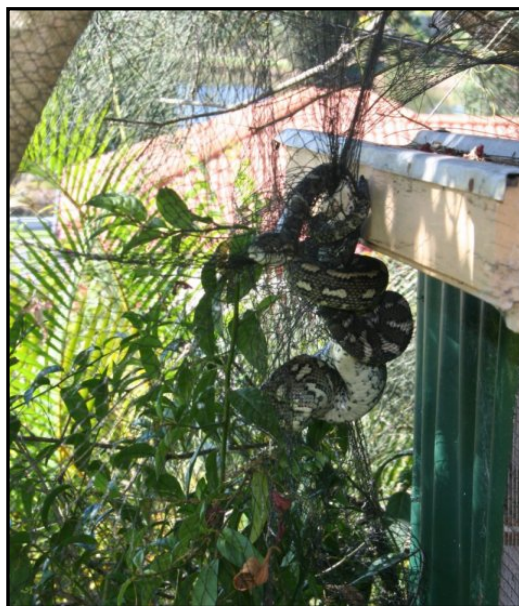
All Wildlife is Protected

Most people know that it is an offence to harm a native animal, and particularly species that are threatened or vulnerable, such as the Grey-headed Flying-fox and several fruit-eating birds, eg Rose-crowned Fruit Dove. What most people are not aware of, however, is that 'harming' an animal includes netting, trapping, capturing, injuring or killing it. Putting up inappropriate netting fits under this definition.

Inappropriate netting

Any netting structure that may harm native animals is unacceptable and should not be used. In particular:

- Never throw netting loosely over trees. Not only can this lead to entanglement, injury or death to wildlife, it is often not effective – some animals can still damage your fruit if the netting is loose.
- Never use thin nylon (monofilament) netting material, even if stretched tightly over a frame, wildlife can still become entangled. Unfortunately, most hardware stores sell such netting, specifically labelled as bird netting, when its use can cause serious injury to birds, as well as other animals.



This carpet python needed to be in care for over six months so that the damage to his skin caused by the loose netting could heal.



This monofilament netting, draped over a grape vine, has the potential to seriously injure native animals. That it is draped over a barbed wire fence makes it a double hazard for wildlife.

Good Netting Design

Proper installation of netting over backyard fruit trees could mean the difference between life and death of our local wildlife. Therefore, if you must put up netting, take note of the following:

- Use a durable knitted netting or, as an inexpensive alternative, 30% blockout shade-cloth.
- White netting is recommended as it is more readily visible to wildlife.
- Stretch the netting taut over a homemade frame. The frame may be constructed of timber, metal or lengths of polythene pipe inserted over star pickets driven into the ground, with spacer bars of pipe or wood to stabilise the frame at the top.
- Ensure the frame is at least one metre clear of the tree.
- The net must be stretched tightly over the frame and pegged securely to the ground, but velcro or tie one side of the net to the frame to allow access to fruit.



In its frantic efforts to free itself from fruit netting, this Black Flying-fox only managed to entangle itself further and could not be saved because of its horrific injuries.

Alternatives

Thirty percent blockout shade-cloth can be thrown over the tree whilst it is fruiting. Use clothes pegs to peg the shade-cloth to the branches which are bearing fruit. The shade-cloth will not stop the fruit from ripening, minimises the risk of wildlife becoming entangled and can be stored away when the fruit is finished.

Alternatively, rather than use netting, tie paper bags over ripening fruit, but note that the bags will need to be replaced if they become wet.

Of course, planting native vegetation that provides blossom, berries and fruits, is always the best alternative. Most animals are eating introduced fruits because of a lack of native food, as humans have encroached on more and more of our native animals' habitat.

Netting Maintenance

Even with appropriate fruit netting, please check your trees daily to ensure the netting is still tight and no wildlife is trapped inside or caught in the netting.

Entangled Wildlife

When wildlife has become entangled in netting or injured in some way:

- Do not try to remove the animal as you may cause more damage to it.
- Call your local wildlife rescue and rehabilitation group, eg TVWC, immediately so that an experienced person with the appropriate skills and, if necessary, vaccinations, can attend.
- Once the animal has been rescued, remove the netting and, if you must net your fruit trees, do so appropriately.
- If you did try to remove a flying-fox and, in the process, were bitten or scratched by it, wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water and contact your local doctor immediately so that you may undertake a course of injections.

Remember, it is **illegal to harm native wildlife** and, with a little bit of effort, it is possible to enjoy your fruit and make sure you are not endangering the local wildlife.