

Encouraging native birds



Having birds flitting about your garden can be a wonderful sight, and they also play important roles in the local ecosystem. By meeting their habitat needs you will be rewarded with their presence and help play an important role in the conservation of our native birdlife.

Birds of South Australia

Over 270 bird species have been recorded in the Adelaide region, of which 16 are introduced whilst at least 76 are threatened with extinction.

Adelaide was, and still is home to a wide variety of birds including owls, spoonbills, falcons and button-quails. Factors such as urban development have reduced the natural range of many birds originally found here.

These species are still around but your chance of seeing one is becoming increasingly less likely. More typical native birds of the Adelaide Park Lands and suburbs include the Australian Magpie, honeyeaters, rosellas and lorikeets.

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 and overabundant native species.

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 food and nesting sites, and increased populations of exotic birds that prosper in response to these altered conditions.

Birds such as the Noisy Miner aggressively exclude smaller native birds. They are one of a number of native species that have come to dominate areas due to their ability to exploit modified habitats. They tend to occupy open spaces with tall trees and 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.

Chemical use

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



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

Photo SA Tourism Commission

Habitat requirements

It is a common misconception that large amounts of nectar producing plants are needed to attract birds; too many of these types of cultivars will encourage the louder, aggressive, native birds such as New Holland Honeyeaters, Rainbow Lorikeets and Red Wattlebirds which, in turn, deter smaller species.

Each bird species has specific diet requirements so it is important to incorporate a variety of native plants that are local to your suburb, and that will provide an assortment of food types. Some birds, such as honeyeaters are specialist nectar feeders, but they also eat insects. Other common foods include native grass seeds, berries, small lizards, other seeds, pollen and fruits.

A variety of local native plants with differing heights and structures will also ensure that their habitat requirements are met. If possible, include thick, prickly shrubs, for example Kangaroo Thorn (*Acacia paradoxa*), Christmas Bush (*Bursaria spinosa*), 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 natural hollows to develop in Australian trees, and therefore, clearance of older and remnant vegetation has led to a missing piece of habitat. Bird species such as rosellas, lorikeets, pardalotes and Kookaburras are just a few of the native birds that rely on hollows for breeding. Installing nestboxes is a good way to mimic natural hollows, but retaining trees (dead or alive) with hollows is always the best option.



Water

A regular source of clean water 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 birdbath, situated close to prickly or thorny shrubs and trees so visiting birds can quickly seek shelter from predators. Clean birdbaths monthly, giving them a good scrub with a plastic brush to remove algae.

You can help

Planting local native species will encourage native birds to visit your garden. Ideally, your garden should include low, medium and high trees and shrubs that will offer protection from predators and domestic pets.

Remember the tall trees in your neighbourhood can do this for you, so you don't necessarily need one in your own yard.

Plant species that flower and fruit during different seasons. Winter-flowering plants are often forgotten in gardens, so grow local native banksias, hakeas and grevilleas in addition to summer and spring flowering local plants.

Don't forget the seed eaters rely on grasses and sedges. Fruits and berries are also important, so incorporate a mix of food plants in your garden today!

Nest 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.

Set it up so you have convenient, regular and safe access (with a ladder) between 4-8 m high or get a specialist to install them for you. Check out the nest box fact sheet for more information.

Control your domestic pets such as cats that prey on or deter birds from visiting your garden. Keep them inside or construct an outside cat run to make your garden safer for cats and wildlife.

Top 5 tips

1. Use plants native to your suburb.
2. Plant species that are a range of heights.
3. Use mix of local native plants that flower 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 help grow a great living environment for Adelaide.



Red-browed finches occur in flocks and rely on insects as well as seeds from grasses and sedges for food
Photo by Dragos Moise.

For more information

Birds South Australia www.birdsa.asn.au

Become a citizen scientist, visit Birds in Backyards, www.birdsinbackyards.net, for more information.

Visit the urban biodiversity page of our website to access more Backyards 4 Wildlife information and contact details for specialist native plant nurseries.

www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au/adelaidemtloftyranges

Or contact your nearest Natural Resources Centre

Black Hill

115 Maryvale Road, Athelstone, SA 5076
P (08) 8336 0901

Eastwood

205 Greenhill Road, Eastwood, SA 5063
P (08) 8273 9100

Gawler

8 Adelaide Road, Gawler South, SA 5118
P (08) 8523 7700

Willunga

5 Aldinga Road, Willunga, SA 5172
P (08) 8550 3400

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