

Birds in Backyards Survey FAQs

Getting Started

What is Birds in Backyards?

[Birds in Backyards](#) is a research, education and conservation program of [BirdLife Australia](#). We are focused on the birds that live where people live, and engaging people in activities that help to protect them. You can get involved by taking part in our Backyard Bird surveys or by becoming a member (it's free!). You can learn how to [create bird-friendly spaces](#) in your garden and local community and find out more about [Australian birds](#) and their habitats.

What is BirdLife Australia?

[BirdLife Australia](#) is the nation's largest bird conservation organisation and an independent, not-for-profit organisation. With our specialised knowledge and the commitment of our extensive network of members, volunteers and supporters, we protect birds and their habitats through our conservation projects, education programs and informed advocacy.

What is a survey?

Surveying is simply recording what birds you see! Bird surveys are not only fun, they can help to identify which birds are in trouble and need your help. To do a Birds in Backyards survey, just spend 20 minutes in your backyard or other favourite place and tally up the number of each type of bird you see. Over time, these surveys help us build a picture of the health of our urban bird communities across Australia.

How do I participate in a Birds in Backyards survey?

To do a Birds in Backyards survey, spend 20 minutes in one spot where you can view birds - your backyard, local park, school, or other favourite outdoor place. Simply count how many you see of each bird species you see. Once you have completed your count, you can submit it to BirdLife through [Birdata](#).

You can view instructions and download 'how-to' PDF's for the Birds in Backyards surveys [here](#).

What is Birdata?

[Birdata](#) is BirdLife Australia's online data portal where surveys can be submitted, and results viewed. It's free for anyone to join and can be accessed on our [desktop](#) or the app from the [App store](#) (Apple) or [Google Play store](#). After registering, you can use Birdata to record bird surveys, view your past surveys, and explore collective data by viewing maps, species and statistics, and much more!

Your surveys are used by [BirdLife Australia](#) and the [Urban Bird Program](#) team to track the health of our urban birds, and to monitor the impact of our gardens, outdoor spaces and even our own behaviours on bird populations. Importantly, your surveys contribute to the on-ground conservation work we undertake with our volunteers, branches and partners. We also use the survey data in seminars and workshops conducted by staff, or for our projects such as the [Powerful Owl Project](#).

We compile the results of Birdata surveys and report them to Birds in Backyards members in our e-News (make sure you are subscribed via your BirdLife Australia account), and on the

Birds in Backyards website. Sometimes data is provided at the request of universities, schools or local councils.

What tools do I need to do a Birds in Backyards survey?

You can submit your surveys through the [Birddata online portal](#) or use the app available for free from your app store on your device. Sign up for a Birddata account [here](#). When you are ready to enter your count on Birddata, choose "Birds in Backyards" under the Record Survey section and follow the prompts.

You don't need any other tools – if you don't have binoculars don't worry, in a garden you will be able to see the birds visiting you quite easily. The Birds in Backyards surveys show you a prepopulated list of 30 birds from your region that you are likely to encounter, many with links for more information. If you need more help with identifying a bird, try using a field guide or our handy [Bird Finder](#).

Where can I get help with Birddata?

Birddata is easy to use once you know your way around, but it can take some getting used to. General Birddata instructions are available [here](#).

We also have some step-by-step guides specific to Birds in Backyards surveys to get you started for the [Birddata web portal](#) and the [app](#).

What is the Birds in Backyards privacy policy?

Your personal details will never be shared or published without your prior, written permission. You can read BirdLife Australia's privacy policy here: birdlife.org.au/privacy-policy

What happens with the survey data?

Your surveys are used by [BirdLife Australia](#) and the Urban Bird team to track the health of our urban birds, and to monitor the impact of our gardens, outdoor spaces and even our own behaviours on bird populations. We can learn a lot from Birds in Backyard surveys, like how different types of gardens can attract different types of birds, and which features birds may be avoiding or are negatively affected by.

Importantly, your surveys contribute to the on-ground conservation work we undertake with our volunteers, branches and partners – from local planting and habitat improvement projects up to national advocacy and campaigns. We also use the survey data in seminars and workshops conducted by staff, or for our projects such as the [Powerful Owl Project](#).

Survey data is stored on [Birddata](#). You can view your own past surveys and data, and explore Birddata's collective data by viewing maps, species and statistics. We compile the results of Birddata surveys and report them to Birds in Backyards members in our e-News (make sure you are subscribed via your BirdLife Australia account), and on the Birds in Backyards website. Sometimes data is provided at the request of universities, schools or local councils. Your private information is never given to a third party, unless with your express consent.

About Our Surveys

Why should I do a Birds in Backyards survey?

Participating in Birds in Backyards surveys is free, fun, and easy. You can complete surveys with your family or friends, on your own or with your class or community. It's a great way for people of all ages and abilities to learn – about your local birds, nature and habitats, citizen science, identification and conservation. Doing a Birds in Backyards survey lets you contribute to what scientists know, to help them protect birds. Your survey information tells us how birds are doing and how our gardens impact the birds visiting. You can also win great prizes, and experience the health and wellbeing benefits that being in nature can bring.

When can I do a Birds in Backyards survey?

Any time you like! The Birds in Backyards surveys are accessible all year round. Some people like to just participate once a quarter (or four times a year) in our seasonal surveys, while others like to count their birds more frequently. Our Autumn surveys can be entered in March and April, Winter surveys in June and July, Spring surveys in September and October, and Summer surveys in December and January.

How many surveys can I do?

You can do as many surveys as you like, as often as you like! Some people like to just participate once a quarter (or four times a year) in our seasonal surveys, while others like to count their birds more frequently. All your survey data is valuable, no matter when you submit it. Just remember to stick to the 20 minutes time limit.

What are the seasonal – Summer, Autumn, Winter and Spring – surveys?

Each quarter we launch a seasonal survey. By dividing the year up into seasons we can track changes in bird communities at the same four times each year. Our Autumn surveys can be entered in March and April, Winter surveys in June and July, Spring surveys in September and October, and Summer surveys in December and January.

What is the difference between Birds in Backyards Surveys and the Aussie Backyard Bird Count?

The Aussie Backyard Bird Count takes place during Bird Week in October - it only happens once a year. This event gives BirdLife Australia a broad, national snapshot of bird numbers for the same week each year that can be compared over a long time period. To participate in the Aussie Backyard Bird Count you use the Aussie Bird Count [website](#) or app, not Birddata. You can find the overall results on the website but cannot track your data outside of the event week.

The Birds in Backyards surveys are available all year round, although you may choose to only submit your data during quarterly surveys. This allows us to explore seasonal trends around natural events like migrations or breeding, natural disasters such as bushfires or floods, or even human induced issues such as poisoning, destructive developments, window strikes, or other urban challenges. Since the surveys are submitted in [Birddata](#), you can access your data anytime you like and explore data from around the country and across all of BirdLife's programs.

Birds in Backyards surveys are more than counting birds – we also collect information about your garden or other favourite outdoor space and your behaviours (for example, whether you own pets or feed birds). You only have to answer these questions once but they provide critical information in explaining the patterns we see in bird communities and help us to focus our conservation and advocacy projects.

The following table summarises both the Birds in Backyards Surveys and the Aussie Backyards Bird Count:

Birds in Backyards Surveys	Aussie Backyard Bird Count
www.birdsinbackyards.net/getinvolved/How-do-Birds-Backyards-survey	aussiebirdcount.org.au/
What is it?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing program • Any time of the year • Seasonal surveys: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Autumn (March & April) ○ Winter (June & July) ○ Spring (September & October) ○ Summer (December & January) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual event • One week each year during Bird Week in October
What to do?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey anywhere you live, work, learn or play, such as home, parks, schools • Include information about habitat, bird interactions, breeding • Track and review your local bird communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Count anywhere for 20 minutes • Participate as many times as you like during Bird Week
Where to submit?	
<p>Birddata website and app: birddata.birdlife.org.au/ Within Birddata, you can access your data anytime you like and explore data from around the country and across all of BirdLife’s programs</p>	<p>Aussie Backyard Bird Count website and app: aussiebirdcount.org.au/ You can find the overall results on the website but cannot track your data or complete surveys outside of the event week</p>
Why participate?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your data helps to broaden our understanding of how birds use urban landscapes and how people affect them • You help to inform the conservation and management of urban birds and spaces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your data contributes to an Australia-wide snapshot of birds at the same time each year • We use this information to identify long-term trends locally and nationally

What is the difference between a 20 minute count and a weekly list?

The 20 minute count and the weekly list are the two options for Birds in Backyards surveys. For the 20 minute count you record the birds observed, and how many of each species. The consistent length of this survey type means BirdLife Australia can examine which birds are visiting and how many of them. This is the most useful and preferred method. The weekly list lets you keep a longer-term record of birds you observe and the incidental birds you may see unexpectedly. Because there is no set time for this method, we can only examine which birds are visiting, not how many individual birds there are. You can include the ‘how many’ in the survey when you submit it and keep it for your own records.

Can I count birds for longer than 20 minutes?

If you want to count for longer than 20 minutes, we suggest you submit consecutive 20 minute counts – two 20 minute surveys for 40 minutes, or three for an hour-long survey. This is because 20 minutes is the standard period for a BirdLife Australia bird survey. Keeping in line with other surveys and having everyone counting for the same time means the data we receive will be more scientifically robust, allowing us to use it in our conservation efforts.

About My Site

Can I do a Birds in Backyards survey if I don't have a backyard?

Yes! Not everyone has a house and garden, but there are so many favourite outdoor spaces to choose from. At your home, you could survey from the back, front or side yard. If you live in a building, you could survey from your balcony, window, or even roof top terrace (in this case define the area you are surveying, for example the patch of grass out front or the street frontage). You could survey from a community garden, local park, or even your school. The possibilities are endless! Just make sure that when you complete the site/garden details you fill it out as best you can for the area you are surveying.

How do I work out how big my survey site is?

You can measure your space using a tape measure, a piece of rope cut to an appropriate length, or an object like a broom that you know the length of. There are also lots of great tools online which allow you to calculate the size of your garden (or the area you are surveying). You could try Google Maps, or something like www.mapdevelopers.com/area_finder.php

Do I have to enter the site details on Birdata every time I do a survey?

No! Birdata automatically remembers all the information you fill in for each of the sites/gardens you have set up. Make sure you select your existing site in the 'Location' tab rather than setting up a new one. When you do another survey of the same site it will ask 'has your site/garden changed since your last survey' - just click 'No' and continue through to the survey. If you do make changes to your site, such as planting shrubs, getting a dog, stopped feeding birds, select 'Yes' and adjust the relevant sections.

How do I do a survey if I live on a big property?

If you have a big property you may want to set up multiple survey locations. You can do this on an average block as well if you would like to survey your front yard and your backyard. Choose sites on your property that have different features for birds, for example, a grassed area for one site, and a treed area as a second site. In Birdata, when you set your location, zoom in nice and close and pick your site. You can then give it a name and record the habitat features under 'Details' for that particular place you are counting in.

Where can I find information on bird-friendly gardening or other bird-attracting activities to encourage more birds into my space?

Birds need a home (habitat) to live, breed and bring up their families. This means food, shelter, water and nesting sites. You can find lots of information about how to provide suitable habitat for birds and other wildlife on the Birds in Backyards website in the [Creating Places for Birds](#) section.

Counting Birds

Can I participate if I don't know anything about birds?

Yes! All you need is 20 minutes, your favourite spot and access to Birdata to record your survey. The Birdata [web portal and app](#) both have great features to help you if you are just getting started, and doing a survey is a great way to learn. When you get to the bird counting page you will see a prepopulated list of 30 birds that are found in your immediate area, with photos! Search through that list and you should see most, if not all of the birds, that are in your garden. The more you survey, the better you will get at identifying your feathered neighbours.

Where can I get help identifying birds?

Check out the [Bird Finder](#) on the Birds in Backyards website, or download the free Aussie Bird Count app, which has a field guide function, from the app store on your device. You can purchase field guide apps and hard copy field guides too. Hop onto our [Facebook group](#) or join one of many bird IDing groups online. If after all that you still have a mystery bird you can't identify, snap a photo or video and email it to us birdsinyourbackyards@birdlife.org.au or tag us on social media.

Do I need binoculars or other special equipment?

No! All you need is 20 minutes, your favourite outdoor spot and the [Birdata website or app](#) to start counting. See which birds you can spot in your space – if they are too far away to identify, then simply exclude them from your survey. And if you can't access Birdata while you are doing your survey, you can note what you see on paper, and record the details online later.

Can I count a bird that flies overhead?

The Birds in Backyards surveys are all about the birds that are using your outdoor space. We are interested in the birds visiting and what is attracting them to your garden – the type of garden features you have. So if a bird is flying straight through, then don't count the bird and just enjoy seeing it. However, if you have a bird circling overhead that is obviously checking out your place (like birds of prey or Welcome Swallows) then that bird can be counted as it is searching your space.

Do I count the birds I hear but don't see?

If you can identify birds by their calls, and you can hear that the bird is calling from within your survey site, yes, include it in your count. If you aren't sure of a bird without seeing it, or if it is not inside your survey area, please exclude it. To train your ear, you can get to know your [Top 40 Bird Songs](#).

What if a bird flies into my space, leaves and then comes back. Do I count it twice?

This can be a bit tricky because it can sometimes be hard to tell if it is the same bird returning. However, we want to know the actual number of birds, not the number of times birds visit. Try to keep track of the birds in the area and just count each bird once. One way to do this is by recording the highest number of individual birds of each species that you see together at any one time. For example, three magpies might pop into the garden, head next door and then two come back again – that is three birds, not five.

How do I include a bird not already in the Birdata list on my screen?

Birdata shows you the top 30 most common species recorded in your general area (a 20km radius), but sometimes you will observe species that are not included. To search for and add a species not on your list on the Birdata web portal, go to the 'Sightings' tab and type the name of the bird in the search bar at the top that says 'Search by species name'. When you see the species name you need, select it from the list. To search for and add a species not on your list on the Birdata app, use the search bar that says 'Search by species name'. Type the name of the bird in there. When you see the name of the bird, click on it and it will add to your list. Birdata will warn you if a particular species may be out of its usual range – however, this

won't keep you from submitting it (although a quick note to say 'definite ID' or similar is needed).

How do I delete a bird from my survey?

On the Birdata web portal there will be an 'X' on the far right hand side of the screen for each bird listed. To remove a bird, click on that 'X'. On the app, swipe left on the bird you want to delete and a red 'delete' option will appear. Click it to delete the bird from your list.

What if I don't see many/any many birds

That is really useful! We want to know about the birds you don't see just as much as the ones you do. So if your list is only small, all introduced birds, or full of birds you don't think are very 'exciting', that is still important information for us. All surveys are important so please keep going.