

Guidelines for Wild Bird Feeding

Supplementary feeding, disease and nutrition advice

Should you feed birds?

The issue of bird feeding is a very controversial one. Many people enjoy feeding birds in their garden, on their balcony or even at their windowsill, but this creates many unseen problems such as malnutrition, disease, and unbalanced populations of some species. If you are going to feed birds, you should be aware of potential problems and consider how you can minimise the risk of harming the wildlife you want to help.

Unsuitable food (causes malnutrition and disease)

The types of foods we put out for birds are very rarely what they find naturally and some actually cause serious problems. **YOU SHOULD AVOID FEEDING BIRDS THE FOLLOWING.**

MINCE: This might seem like a treat but it lacks important nutrients that carnivorous birds would normally obtain from their natural diet of insects and the fur and bones of small mammals. Huge problems can arise if the adult birds raise their young on this diet as the juvenile birds can suffer from brittle bones due to insufficient calcium. Mince can also stick to the beaks of birds like Kookaburras and Tawny Frogmouths, leading to bacterial infection. If you feed other meat to birds, add an insectivore supplement to it.

HONEY/WATER MIXES: These do not provide the complex sugars that a bird would get from the nectar of a flower.

Suitable food

Food Type	Birds	Tips
Nectar mix (wet or dry)	Honeyeaters, Parrots	Spoils very quickly. Discard within a few hours. Quicker in hot weather. Avoid using this food if you cannot clean it up quickly
Fruit	Parrots, Pigeons/Doves, Bowerbirds	Spoils quickly. Discard within half a day. Avoid putting out fruit if you cannot clean up after it quickly
Mealworms + other insects	Insect-eaters (Fantails, Willie Wagtails, Fairy-wrens, Scrubwrens), Magpies, Butcherbirds, some Honeyeaters	Available from pet supply stores live or freeze-dried
Seed	Parrots (Cockatoos, Galahs, Corellas, Rosellas), Finches, Pigeons/Doves	Avoid large amounts of sunflower seeds (very fatty). Ensure seed stations are out of reach of Kangaroos and Wallabies
Dog kibble, raw meat	Magpies, Ravens/Crows, Butcherbirds, Currawongs, Kookaburras	Consider the impact they may have by hunting smaller birds. Add a calcium supplement like Wombaroo Insectivore Mix



Disease

Bird feeders have been linked to spreading disease. They will be particularly susceptible after fire due to the stress they will be facing. **To help prevent the spread of disease at your bird feeder ensure the area is very clean and well scrubbed daily using a dilute bleach solution or specific wildlife disinfectant.**

PSITTACINE BEAK AND FEATHER DISEASE

Parrots can spread Psittacine Beak and Feather disease at unhygienic feeding stations. This virus attacks the feather follicles and the cells that grow beaks and claws. Feathers become malformed and eventually fall. Beaks and claws grow uncontrollably and can crack and break, leading to infections and potentially stop the bird from being able to feed.

Beak and feather disease suppresses the immune system, opening the bird up to a range of secondary infections. Those mangy, balding Sulphur-crested Cockatoos that you may occasionally see are infected with disease. If you do have parrots with beak and feather disease visiting, immediately cease feeding and clean your feed station. You may also wish to contact your local wildlife rescue group if the bird is very sick and needs to be captured for treatment.

Top Bird Feeding Tips

- Place feed stations out of reach of cats and other predators
- Watch which birds you are feeding. If you are only feeding your typical successful urban birds (like Rainbow Lorikeets and Sulphur-crested Cockatoos) change the type of food you are providing or stop feeding altogether
- If you are feeding quieter/shyer birds, put the feeder in a quiet place in the garden
- Clean feeding stations daily by brushing off excess food, washing and scrubbing with a dilute bleach solution (and rinsing again)
- Vary the time of day in which you provide the food
- You can use multiple feeding stations for different types of food
- Think about what other wildlife you might be feeding. Kangaroos and wallabies can suffer from 'lumpy jaw' if they eat bird seed – so ensure feeders with bird seed are out of reach
- Cease feeding if large flocks (20+) birds begin feeding at the same time or you observe for any illness in the birds you are feeding
- Pets should be fed indoors or remaining food removed. Common Mynas and other birds regularly eat pet food so we should limit their access to it
- Feed stations can sometimes attract rats and mice. Don't put out rodenticides as these can poison owls and other carnivorous birds
- Remember this is a treat - for them and for you. Make it something you enjoy once a week or less, not a daily occurrence
- Consider planting more native species in your garden to create natural feeding resources



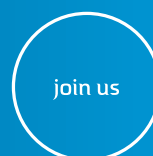
Australia's voice for birds since 1901

BirdLife Australia is dedicated to achieving outstanding conservation results for our native birds and their habitats.

With our specialised knowledge and the commitment of an Australia-wide network of volunteers and supporters, we are creating a bright future for Australia's birds.

birdlife.org.au

Add your voice



Enjoy the rewards of membership, making a real difference for our native birds



Contributing your time is one of the most effective ways to help



Help us create positive outcomes for birds and their habitats