

Feeding urban wildlife

Leaving food scraps out for the quenda in your backyard, giving magpies mince or feeding bread to ducks is something that many people enjoy doing. Unfortunately people rarely consider the damage they may be doing to wildlife. Unintentional harmful behaviour such as feeding inappropriate food to wildlife, is putting them at risk. Healthy wildlife is an integral part of overall health and wellbeing in communities.

Feeding wildlife – why do we do it?

- Backyard feeding is an **easy way** for people to get close to wildlife.
- Interaction with wildlife has many **health benefits** for people including:
 - decreasing blood pressure, heart rate, and cholesterol;
 - reducing anxiety and stress, and providing protection against stress related diseases.¹
- People want to make up for the **damage** people do to the environment.
- Interaction with animals can improve people's **quality of life** as this provides companionship and kinship and offers the opportunity to nurture.

Feeding wildlife – what happens to them?

- Backyard feeding provides wildlife with short term benefits, such as an **easy to get meal**, so there is no need for the animal or bird to find their own food.
- Food given to wildlife may cause **nutritional imbalances**.
- Young animals can become **dependent** on food provided by humans.
- Some urban wildlife are **getting fatter**. For example, a recent study of quenda in the Perth Hills found that quenda in the urban environment **weigh more** than quenda in bushland.²



Obese quenda at Murdoch University. Photo: Dr. Alison Hillman. Quenda in the bush. Photo: Kimberley Page



- Wildlife can **lose their fear** of humans and pets, which may increase their vulnerability to abuse and predation.
- Feeding wildlife can lead to an abnormally increased population density, which may cause problems such as **increased aggression**.
- Wildlife interactions can **transfer diseases** between humans, domestic pets and wildlife, which may have adverse consequences for all species.

What are the alternatives?

Feeding wildlife is not recommended. There are simple changes that you can make, or things that you can do, to help protect wildlife in your backyards.

- Small changes in the diet of animals and birds can mean big changes in health – if you choose to feed wildlife, learn more about what foods are best for them.
- Plant plenty of native vegetation in your backyard to provide a food source and protection for wildlife.
- Provide water for wildlife, particularly in summer.
- Ensure wildlife are safe from pets on your property and don't allow wildlife access to pet food.

Find out more

<http://www.backyardbuddies.org.au/build-buddy-habitats>

<https://www.dpaw.wa.gov.au/plants-and-animals/animals/living-with-wildlife/90-why-you-should-not-feed-wild-animals>

About Healthy Wildlife

The 'Healthy Wildlife Healthy Lives' – A One Health project aims to educate the public about people's interaction with wildlife in urban areas, particularly how people and domestic animals spread diseases to wildlife, such as birds, quenda (bandicoots), native fish, bobtails and kangaroos. The project informs people about how to avoid harm to wildlife, create positive interactions with wildlife and protect and conserve the environment. The aim is to keep wildlife healthy for a healthier world.

The project is a partnership between Eastern Metropolitan Regional Council and Murdoch University, supported by Lotterywest.

VISIT: www.healthywildlife.com.au

References:

¹ 'Healthy parks, healthy people' – The health benefits of contact with nature in a park context. A review of relevant literature 2nd edition School of Health and Social Development, Faculty of Health, Medicine, Nursing and Behavioural Sciences, Deakin University. Page 54, March 2008.

² Hillman Alison, Thompson R. C. Andrew (2016) Interactions between humans and urban-adapted marsupials on private properties in the greater Perth region. *Australian Mammalogy* **38**, 253-255. <http://www.publish.csiro.au/AM/AM15045>