

Should I feed wild kangaroos and wallabies?

Offering wild kangaroos and wallabies food is not recommended.



It is not uncommon to see kangaroos and wallabies on the urban fringes of Perth. Areas that provide shelter, water and grass, such as outer suburban parks, golf courses and urban fringe bushland are suitable habitats for the urban dwelling macropod. These animals can become quite comfortable around humans and may be enticed to come close with food. However, by feeding native wildlife we may be doing more harm than good. Providing human food to native animals can lead to **nutritional imbalances**, increase the **spread of disease** and result in **negative influences on animal behaviour**.

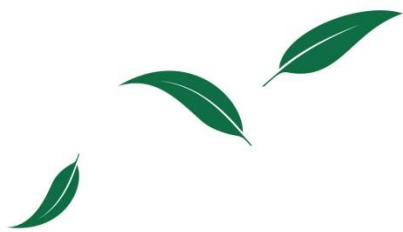
Nutritional imbalances

Human food is not natural for kangaroos and wallabies and **can make them sick**. Kangaroos and wallabies are **herbivores** and will graze on **grassland** or browse **native shrubs**. Human food can cause nutritional imbalances in kangaroos and wallabies which may lead to **obesity** and other **life threatening complications**.

Bread is a popular choice to offer kangaroos and wallabies however it provides little of the nutritional requirements for these animals. In addition too much soft food can lead to a disease called Lumpy Jaw - a serious bacterial infection of the jaw.² **Hay with hard stalks** can also pierce the gums and allow the bacteria that cause Lumpy Jaw to invade.

Besides the lack of nutrition in human food, the amount given is also important. Wallabies in particular are much smaller than humans so **even small portions of human food** can be very unhealthy for them. Along with the associated health risks from a bad diet, overweight animals are less able to evade predators.

IF YOU FEED A WALLABY:		THE HUMAN EQUIVALENT IS:	
	1 slice of bread	=	hamburger and chips
			
<small>*kilojoules/day required for a Wallaby has been calculated from equations estimating field metabolic rates.¹ These are then compared to the kilojoules/day required for the average human (8700kj). This is a direct kj/day comparison and does not take into account the specific dietary requirements of different species. ¹Nagy, K.A. Giardi, I.A. Brown, T.K. 1999. Energetics of free-ranging mammals, reptiles and birds. Ann. rev. Nutr. 19:247-277</small>			



Spread of disease

Providing a regular supply of artificial food can draw many animals into a single area which may promote the spread of disease. These areas can become highly contaminated with kangaroo faeces and grazing in these areas may lead to the increased transmission of many parasite species.

Disrupting natural behaviour

Feeding brings kangaroos and wallabies into close contact with people and possible conflict. Aggressive animals within the mob can pose a danger to people, especially families with young children. Losing their fear for humans may also make kangaroos and wallabies **more vulnerable to abuse** by other people.



Kangaroos waiting for a feed. Photo: Cathy Levett

We do not recommend feeding wild kangaroos and wallabies. However, if you must feed them you should aim to minimise the risk of harm:

- Completely avoid unhealthy (and potentially life-threatening) foodstuffs such as **bread and other baked goods**.



Bread

- Offer long dry grass and hay (not stalky) or specific kangaroo pellets instead.
- Purchase kangaroo muesli, known as skippy mix, available from most stockfeeders.

Sources:

¹ Nagy, K.A., Girard, I.A., Brown, T.K. 1999. Energetics of free-ranging mammals, reptiles and birds. *Ann. Rev. Nutr.* 19: 247-277

² Jackson, S. 2003. Australian mammals, biology and captive management. CSIRO publishing, Collingwood, Australia