

Help Keep Our Wildlife Wild

8 reasons not to feed wild animals

In South Australia, we share the environment with a diverse range of wildlife, and it is important that we all play our part in keeping them wild. Feeding wild animals, and even providing water, can upset the balance of nature. Despite good intentions it can sometimes do more harm than good.

This factsheet explains why feeding wild animals is not recommended, and also provides information on how you can help wildlife and enjoy seeing them in a natural environment.

Feeding and watering wild animals is **not** recommended as it can:

1. alter their natural behaviour in the wild
2. cause poor nutrition
3. contribute to their overpopulation
4. make some animals aggressive
5. benefit pest species
6. lead to property damage from unwelcome wildlife
7. spread disease
8. affect water and environmental quality

Feeding wildlife is **not** recommended as it can:

1. Alter their natural behaviour in the wild

Wild animals may become dependent when fed by people and less able to find food and water from natural sources.

Also, they may lose their fear of people and approach them for food. It is important that wildlife maintain their natural wariness towards people.

2. Cause poor nutrition

Native animals have specialised diets. Food given by people does not always provide appropriate nutrition for native animals and this can cause serious health problems or even death.

3. Contribute to overpopulation

In the natural environment, the rate of breeding and survival is strongly influenced by how much natural food and water is available.

When additional food and water become too easily available, native animals can gather and breed in large numbers, resulting in them producing more young than the environment can support. This means the natural food sources may not be able to sustain a larger population, leading to adverse impacts on the environment through over-grazing of vegetation and sometimes harm to threatened species.

4. Make some animals aggressive

Some native animals are territorial and they do not generally interact with others of their own species except during their breeding season and when raising their young. Artificial feeding can result in animals unnaturally gathering, leading to aggression as the animals compete for food.

Also, feeding wildlife may increase the population of some species (e.g. magpies, noisy miners) who may aggressively defend an area, pushing out other native species and potentially harming humans.





5. Benefit pest species

Food and water provided for wildlife can benefit pest species such as rats, feral pigeons and foxes. Pests can benefit directly from consuming the food and water, and also indirectly by preying on the wildlife that gather at the food and water sources that are left by humans.

6. Lead to property damage from unwelcome wildlife

With easy access to food and water, some species spend their newfound spare time playing instead of foraging. Sometimes this play can lead to damage of property, with some species known to chew wiring, wooden fixtures and other infrastructure causing costly repairs for the property owners.

7. Help spread disease

Animals crowding at artificial feeding or watering points (e.g. bird baths or feeders, buckets of water for kangaroos), and a lack of regular and proper cleaning and disinfection of these sites themselves, can create an ideal situation for sick animals to transmit diseases to other wildlife.

It is also important to remember that some native animals can carry diseases that have the potential to be spread to humans through contact with them.

8. Affect water and environmental quality

Water quality problems can occur where large numbers of ducks and other waterfowl congregate at ponds and lakes to be fed. Animal waste can also affect environmental amenity and human safety by creating a risk of slipping on soiled surfaces.

Food and water containers themselves can be unsightly, especially when left without the landowner or land managers consent and are not regularly cleaned and disinfected.

How to help wildlife

If you find a sick, injured or orphaned native animal, it is vital that it is appropriately cared for. You can take sick, injured or orphaned native animals to a vet for care and treatment, or you can search online for your local wildlife rescue organisation. These organisations are run by volunteers, so please understand that they will help the best that they can, but may not be able to respond immediately.

It is understandable to be concerned for the welfare of wildlife during periods of prolonged drought or after bushfires. Seek guidance from the National Parks and Wildlife Service prior to providing any food or water for wildlife in these circumstances as management strategies may already be in place.

Appreciate wild animals in their natural habitat by visiting your local national parks and remember to keep a safe distance from animals to allow them to remain wild whilst hiking, camping or enjoying other outdoor activities.

Encourage native wildlife into your garden by providing and maintaining areas of suitable natural habitat, such as planting native shrubs or providing nest boxes. Ask your local nursery for tips on what local plant species would be suitable for your backyard.

Consider becoming a volunteer where you can experience native wildlife in a natural environment and help conserve their habitat for the future. Connect with your local 'Friends of Parks' group or local government environmental volunteer group.

More information

Email: DEW.WildlifePolicy@sa.gov.au

www.environment.sa.gov.au

For further information on animal health please visit Wildlife Health Australia:

www.wildlifehealthaustralia.com.au

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