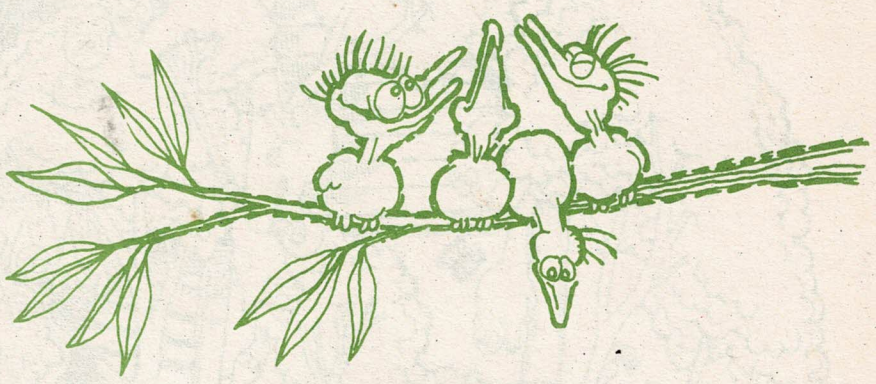
Wildlife in your backyard



Most native plants and animals occur on private land, not on national parks and reserves. For this reason, what you do on your own land is extremely important to nature conservation in Queensland and Australia. Unfortunately plant communities on such land are rapidly disappearing; this means that many native animals must also go, as they cannot survive without their preferred habitats. Your help is needed to reverse this trend. You can actively encourage native wildlife to live in your backyard by following a few simple principles.

Grow native plants. The species most easily established in your garden are those which grow naturally in your area. The specific needs of the animals you are trying to attract should be considered. Their basic requirements are food, water and cover for protection from the weather and their enemies.

Where appropriate, establish grevilleas (a favourite is *Grevillea banksii*), bottle brushes (*Callistemon* spp.), banksias (*Banksia* spp.) and umbrella trees (*Schefflera actinophylla*) to encourage nectar and pollen eaters such as lorikeets, honeyeaters and some possums. Tea-trees (*Melaleuca* spp.) and many eucalypts will attract a large variety of animals. Grasses and seed-bearing trees such as sheoaks (*Casuarina* spp.) attract finches and seed-eating parrots. Possums and fruit bats, as well as some birds, are attracted to ripe fruit. Mangoes, pawpaws, bananas, mulberries and grapes sometimes attract unwanted attention and require protection if the fruit is for the breakfast table.

Butterflies and their larvae feed on *Aristolochia* vines (but not *A.elegans* which is poisonous to them), citrus, cassias (*Cassia* spp.) and wattles (*Acacia* spp.).

Try not to use pesticides, since the grubs and beetles that eat native plants are themselves a source of food for insect-eating animals such as mice, willie wagtails, butcher-birds, tree-creepers, cuckoos, kingfishers, lizards and frogs; insects also form part of the diet of some possums particularly the sugar and squirrel gliders.

Natural forests have several layers and many animals have adapted to particular layers (eg. upper canopy, shrub layer, forest floor). You can create these layers in your backyard, and even a small area can support one large tree, properly placed. Your nurseryman will help you select native plants to provide variety in foliage height and density. Provision of natural food sources is far better than artificial feeding stations. A garden of native grasses, shrubs and trees will require little attention and no fertilisers. Don't dispose of the leaves and twigs that fall: the resulting leaf litter contains an excellent food supply for scrub wrens, whipbirds, brush turkeys, lizards and numerous other native animals.

With a minimum of effort and a lot of fun, you can make a major contribution to the conservation of our native wildlife.

For further information

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