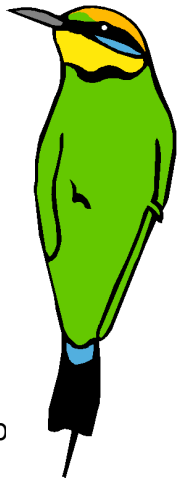


GARDEN FOR WILDLIFE

Wildlife Corridors

In November, Garden for Wildlife reached its 100th member- a fantastic testimony to the enthusiasm of Alice Springs residents in creating wildlife habitat and participating in biodiversity conservation on their blocks. Coincidentally, our 100th member resides on Chewings St. along with 7 other Garden for Wildlife blocks. This street has more Garden for Wildlife properties than any other in Alice Springs. Having a number of properties on the same street aligns with Garden for Wildlife's objective to create wildlife corridors throughout town.



Alice Springs was once covered by a mosaic of vegetation types. This mosaic supported many species of animal that moved, mated and dispersed throughout their territories and beyond. Disturbance such as clearing has left fragments of vegetation isolated, and the land is dotted with islands of preserved vegetation. Species unable to move across this changed landscape are vulnerable to local extinction.

Wildlife corridors link these areas of remnant native country. Wildlife corridors are corridors of land containing appropriate vegetation, which allow flora and fauna to move across a wider territory. One of the primary goals of the Garden for Wildlife program is to include private landholders in the program to retain or establishing vegetation connectivity. The existence of corridors allows wildlife to do a number of things

- Respond to environmental variability. This enables animals to move from areas with a scarcity of water/food to more plentiful areas
- Respond to population pressure. This enables animals to move from overpopulated to less-populated areas when necessary.
- Maintain genetic diversity. This provides animals with a wider range of breeding partners, preventing inbreeding in a local population.

As Garden for Wildlife members in a region where much of our remnant bushland remains intact (although sometimes threatened by weeds, feral animals or building developments), you can play a significant role in ensuring your property is a strong, effective link in a wildlife corridor.

It is extremely advantageous in corridor maintenance/creation to have a number of interconnected blocks involved. The wider and larger the wildlife corridor is, the more effectively it provides habitat.

Even if your property is isolated from other wildlife blocks, it is useful in an urban context, as smaller wildlife refuges can be created by choosing local native, bird-attracting species and providing habitat for smaller invertebrates and lizards. Fallen logs and leaf litter are ideal for this, and even old pieces of timber or corrugated iron can be a haven for a small creature.

Small insect-eating (insectivorous) birds and nectar-feeders (nectarivores) have been most affected by urbanisation in Australia. Only 15 % of all the species commonly found in cities weigh less than 15 g. This

contrasts with birds in native bushland, where around 40 % weigh less than 15 g. In comparison, larger birds dominate cities, with 30 % of species in the 80 g to 200 g weight range; in bushland, less than 10 % of bird species weigh this much. One of these reasons is the lack of understory and layers provided in many urban areas.

Gardens with tall trees and grass, but no understory, encourage the dominance of larger bird species, such as the Yellow-throated Miner, Galahs, Butcherbirds, Australian Ringnecks, etc. These are more aggressive birds which exclude smaller birds from their territory. One reason that the larger birds do well in urban areas is that they are more likely to benefit from human-created foods (petfood, garbage, foodscraps and carrion) than small birds. Their dominance can cause an ecological imbalance in that the small birds they exclude are specialised insect eaters which feed on leaf-eating invertebrates. In the absence of these insect eating birds, tree and shrub health can seriously decline.

Layers of vegetation also provide habitat for a wider diversity of wildlife species. It is necessary to have structural as well as native plant species diversity. Small birds, for instance, require different layers of vegetation, including an understorey. Ground covers, small trees, herbs, shrubs etc provide the physical structure and complexity essential for providing habitat for moving, foraging, resting, breeding and avoiding predators. Modifications of the natural landscape and reduction in size reduce the abundance of species present in a given area.

This being said, local native plant species diversity remains vital to attracting a wide variety of birds. For instance, nectarivores such as honeyeaters and parrots, are attracted to species such as *Hakeas*, *Grevilleas*, *Eucalyptus*, *Eremophilas* and *Melaleucas*, whilst Granivores such as pigeons, parrots and finches are attracted to native grasses and *Acacias*.

Other hints for creating corridors for birds include:

- Planting thorny, dense species, where birds are safe and protected from predators. Thorny species ideal for bird habitat include *Hakeas*, Dead Finish *Acacia Tetragonophylla* and *Spinifex Triodia ssp.*
- Encourage thick leaf litter or use mulch. This encourages worms, insects and grubs to thrive, providing birds with food, suppressing weeds and retaining moisture in the soil at the same time. Leaf litter, such as barks and sticks, also provide material for building nests.
- Provide a permanent, safe water source such as a bird bath or a pond. In times of drought birds are more likely to venture into urban areas to find water.
- Exclude domestic pets that can prey upon or disturb birds.

Garden for Wildlife is currently trying to encourage memberships from clusters of blocks, therefore expanding the geographical area committed to conservation. This is why talking to your neighbours about Garden for Wildlife could direct them towards making a decision to commit to providing wildlife-attractive habitat on their blocks.