



Conservation for Kids

Doing Your Part to Protect the Environment

A Natural Ecosystem and the Impact of Humans

In one backyard there is a tiny universe of plants and animals that are dependent on one another and the environment for survival. The place that an animal calls home is known as their habitat, which contains all the things they need to survive, including space, light, water, food, shelter, protection, and a place to breed.

Many native plants and animals have already become extinct, which means they have been lost from our environment. Furthermore, there are many more species that are threatened, which means that they are at risk of becoming extinct.

The main reason that animals and plants become extinct or threatened is because their habitat has been altered, or even destroyed. External influences from humans; such as pollution from vehicles, chemicals, introduced plants (weeds) and feral animals, clearance of native vegetation (to make way for farms, roads and houses), changing water courses and draining artesian water sources (to provide water for people); all have a damaging effect on natural ecosystems. But these negative influences on the environment can be prevented with your help!

What Can You Do To Help?

Learn about your local environment

Visit a nearby national park or reserve and go on a guided walk or adventure of your own. You can talk to the rangers and see if there are any threatened species in the park. If so, find out what is being done to protect them.



Discover the old trees in your area and monitor their hollows for nesting birds and other wildlife. Be sure to keep your distance so you don't disturb the breeding animals. Learn about the species and what they need for survival and reproduction.

You may wish to install a bird bath to provide fresh and clean drinking water to native birds. Ensure that it is raised off the ground and located near shrubbery to provide the birds with protection from predators. You can observe the visiting wildlife from a distance and identify the species that rely on the water source. A pond is also a good method of providing water for reptiles and other ground-dwelling animals.

Identify the plants in your garden. Keep track of when they flower and when they produce fruit or seed. What do the flowers and seeds look like? Are there particular animals that visit the plant? Do they use it for shelter or as a food source? If they are feeding on it, what part of the plant do they eat? Keep notes so that you can see patterns over time.

Keep a nature journal. A nature journal will help you to fine tune your senses and develop observation skills. Write down and draw interesting things that you see in the environment. What was special about them? Why did you find them interesting? How does the object of interest relate to other aspects in the environment? Share the journal with your friends, family or school.

Conserve habitats

If you have a garden, you can keep patches of bush as wildlife habitat. Encourage your friends to do the same. It's worthwhile keeping as many different native plant species in this habitat as possible to encourage a diversity of animals to inhabit the area. If there isn't much existing vegetation, you may wish to plant some. Choose local native species where possible, as these are more likely to attract native birds, butterflies, insects and other animals.

If you can't protect habitat in your own garden, you may wish to join a local Landcare group to protect a patch of land. Landcare groups remove weeds and sometime plant local native species or allow natural regeneration to occur, which in turn encourages wildlife to return.

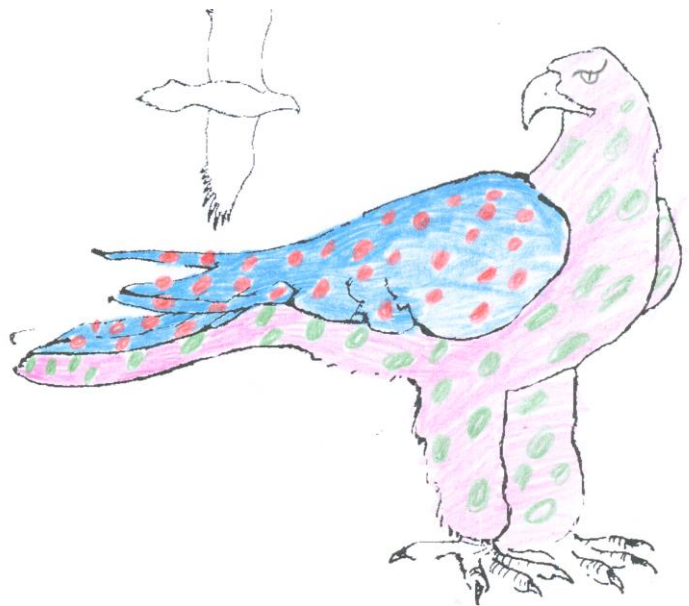
Keep the Wildlife 'Wild'

When you interact with wildlife, ensure that you keep a safe distance. This is to protect you, but is also to protect the animal. Avoid interacting directly or picking up animals, as their behaviour and health may be impacted through stress or disease. While feeding birds and other animals can seem helpful, you are enabling the desensitisation of wildlife to the presence of humans and promoting their reliance on humans for food. Avoid feeding wildlife to ensure that they remain wild.

"Take only photographs and leave only footprints!"

This is a common saying and it means that you shouldn't take any rocks or plants with you when you leave a place, as each component of the environment is keeping the ecosystem balanced, and provides a component of habitat that needs to be protected. Stay on the path when hiking to protect the native vegetation and avoid damaging plants as you walk.

The saying also means that you shouldn't leave any rubbish behind – take it with you or pop it in the bin. Pick up rubbish when you are out and about in natural areas or in your neighbourhood. Picking up rubbish and placing it in a bin will mean that the wildlife won't be able to eat it or get caught in it by accident, the rubbish won't pollute the environment and you will be doing your bit to help keep the natural world beautiful.



Control weeds and feral animals

Weeds are plants that are not native to an area and have been introduced from another location. Weeds often compete with native plants for water, sunlight, nutrients and space. This can mean that native plants struggle to survive when surrounded by weeds. You can remove weeds in your local area to help the native species to flourish.

Feral animals impact the environment in a negative way by competing or preying on native wildlife. For example, feral Cats are keen hunters and capable of killing many native animals for food. Spotted Turtle-doves out-compete native birds for food and nesting resources. You may wish to help reduce the impact of feral animals by engaging in a safe and ethical trapping program with the assistance of Land for Wildlife and Garden for Wildlife.

If your domestic pet is hunting wildlife, implement some appropriate management practices. For example, keep your pet inside, have it de-sexed and register it with the Alice Springs Town Council. Ensure that any unwanted pets are not dumped in the bush. Give the pet to a friend, sell it to another willing pet owner, or take it to the RSPCA.

Conserve Resources

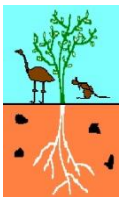
Conserve our precious water resources by turning off the tap when not in use and taking short showers. Ask your parents to install a water tank to collect rainwater for drinking and use on the garden. Central Australia has a finite water source – limiting your reliance on the main water supply will help to conserve it for longer.

Recycle bottles, cardboard and electronic waste to prevent these items going to landfill. Buy in bulk to reduce plastic waste and take reusable bags to the supermarket. If the item can't be recycled but is still in good working condition, consider giving the unwanted items to charity. Take time to think before you buy new items to ensure you aren't wasteful. Check that the items come from ethical sources to prevent unnecessary damage to the environment. For example, does the food product you are looking for contain palm oil from an unethical source?

Make compost to recycle any organic and biodegradable waste, such as your food (fruit and vegetable matter) and garden scraps (lawn clippings and other green waste). This will help to feed your garden with nutrients and limit the contribution to landfill.

Be mindful of chemicals and avoid disposing of chemicals in ways that may impact the environment. There are many ecofriendly options available for use. Consider researching the chemicals used in your house and see if there are alternatives that could be made or purchased instead.

Reduce the reliance on vehicles and their associated pollution by riding a bike. Bikes are environmentally friendly, but also help to keep you active.



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