
How you can help birds in your own backyards after the fires

by Dr Holly Parsons, BirdLife Australia's Urban Birds Program Manager

We have all seen the utter devastation of the fires across huge areas of Australia and we all want to do something. So, BirdLife Australia's Urban Birds team has compiled a few ways to help birds in our own backyards in the immediate aftermath of these fires and also looking into the future.

1. Water

Providing water in your yard is an easy but important way to help out. You don't need to go out and buy a fancy bird bath. Instead, look at what you have around your home. Pot saucers, tubs, buckets, hanging pots, upside down bin lids, ceramic dishes, kids clam shell pools – all make great options. But not metal as it can heat up too much. Different depths and types of baths provide lots of options for different birds. Be sure to:

- Place them in the shade around the garden at various heights - on the ground, on a pedestal, hanging from a tree
- Keep them close to shrubs and trees so birds can have an escape route
- Put rocks, a brick or a branch in the water, so anything that falls in can climb out
- Change the water daily or whenever it gets hot
- Keep cats indoors and if you have a dog, place the baths in an area where it cannot access

2. Supplementary food

If you live near where these fires have occurred, you can help by putting out some supplementary food for fleeing birds to help them in the immediate aftermath. There can be issues with feeding birds that you should be aware of:

- Keep feeding stations impeccably clean. These birds will already have stressed immune systems and so will likely be particularly susceptible to disease. Clean the stations regularly by removing excess food, washing the station and scrubbing it with a wire brush
- Remove food after about an hour (less for nectar mixes as they spoil quickly)
- Provide a range of foods for different types of birds and on different feeding stations. Don't forget about the little insectivores, honeyeaters and finches. Try: mealworms or other invertebrates, fruit, nectar mixes, seed or chopped up dog food rolls.
- Avoid bread (it's just a filler that provides minimal nutrition), honey/water mixes, straight sunflower seeds (which are very fatty) and mince. Mince is nutritionally incomplete and sticks to beaks, sometimes causing bacterial infections.
- Ensure stations are out of reach of cats, dogs and other potential threats
- Place stations in a quiet space for shyer birds to use
- Feeding shouldn't be a long-term solution. As habitat recovers and new plants establish, birds will be able to find food naturally and you can taper off on your feeding efforts.

3. Shade

Don't worry if birds are seeking shelter in your yard but not drinking, despite there being water available. Birds will open their beaks, drop and open their wings in order to cool down. Give them some space and allow them to rest. If you can, observe them from a distance to make sure they are OK. Use a spray bottle to mist some vegetation to help create a cool patch. Most of us are under water restrictions so avoid sprinklers. Put up garden umbrellas to help create some extra shady spots.

4. Helping sick/injured birds

While most birds in the path of a fire perish, others can be injured by the flames, radiant heat or smoke inhalation, or they may be disoriented. If you do find a bird that appears to be sick or injured:

- Handle the bird gently but firmly and wear gloves where ever possible or use a towel
- Put the bird into a well-ventilated box and keep it dark and quiet while you get treatment. This reduces the stress and shock for the bird and is the best treatment you can give.
- Don't feed the bird or give it water. This could cause the bird to aspirate or delay any treatment it might need.

Contact your local wildlife rescue group or vet. According to legislation, you must be a licenced wildlife carer in order to rehabilitate wildlife. This means, if you find a sick or injured bird, you must hand it over to a licenced wildlife rescue group or take it to a vet.

5. Monitor

In order to best understand the impacts of these fires on bird populations, we need people out there monitoring and recording what they see. Birds in Backyards has seasonal surveys that record what birds you have in your garden in a simple 20 min count alongside some information about what your garden is like. This summer we are specifically looking at whether gardens with bird baths have more birds visiting them than those without, but we expect to also see birds showing up in areas that they usually don't due to the fires. [Never has it been more important to submit a survey](#).

6. Plant

While we never want to discourage anyone from getting out in the garden, summer is not a great time for planting. With water restrictions and the extreme temperatures, it will be challenging to keep new plants alive in the short term. Instead, use the next couple of months to research some suitable plants for your garden and map out the best locations for them. See our Creating Space section for more planting advice: [How to make your garden a safe haven](#)

The Urban Birds Team and our Birds in Backyards Program sends its love and sympathy to all of those impacted by these horrific fires. We thank you all for working to help getting communities and wildlife back on their feet again.

You can find more about the BirdLife Australia's Birds in Backyards Program at
<http://www.birdsinbackyards.net/>.

If you want to learn more about birds in the Shoalhaven and receive the free quarterly BirdLife Shoalhaven Magazine, go to <http://birdlifeshoalhaven.org/joinus.html>.