

Should I offer birds food?

Offering birds food is not recommended.

- Human food is not natural for birds, and **can make them sick**. Human foods can cause **nutritional imbalances** which may cause life threatening illnesses and obesity. Raw meat can be a source of **potentially fatal infections**. Adult birds may also return to their nests to feed raw meat to their chicks, which can result in **deformities in the chicks' growing bones**.
- Birds are relatively small compared to humans, and so **even small portions of human food** can be very unhealthy for them.
- The numbers of some larger types of birds have increased in urban areas through supplementary feeding, **directly resulting in other smaller species of bird declining in numbers** in many areas due to competition from and predation by the larger birds.
- Feeding birds may result in them **losing their fear of humans** and as a result make them **more vulnerable to abuse** by other people.



Photos: Kimberley Page

There are plenty of things you can do to assist birds living in your garden, **to encourage their presence without the risk of causing them harm**.

- Ensure birds are safe from pets on your property by **keeping cats indoors, or confined to outdoor enclosures**.
- Plant **plenty of native vegetation in your garden**, to provide shelter and food sources. Ask your local nursery for advice on suitable local plants. General suggestions include: Eucalypts which provides food for nectar-feeding and some seed-eating birds; Banksia, Grevillea and Callistemon which provide food for nectar-feeding birds; and a range of local plants, and mulch in your garden, will promote insects and reptiles for birds that feed on these.



- **Minimise the use of plant and insect poisons in your garden.** Birds are sensitive to poisons and can absorb poison in a number of ways – particularly by eating poisoned insects, or eating material from plants sprayed with poison. Additionally, poisoning insects directly impacts on food available to insectivorous birds.

Feeding birds is not recommended. However, if you choose to, you should aim to minimise the risk of harm:

- Completely avoid unhealthy (and potentially life-threatening) foodstuffs such as **bread (and other baked goods), black sunflower seeds, raw and processed meats, avocado, and honey and sugar mixes.**



Bread



**Baked
goods**



**Raw
meat**

- Offer **small portions** of safer foods, and **not everyday**.
 - **Mealworms are a preferred option for insectivorous or omnivorous birds** (such as ducks, magpies, galahs, ravens, willie wagtails and wattlebirds).
 - Small amounts of **shredded lettuce, corn or peas** are reasonable options for swans.
- Offer food in a way that **minimises the risk of harm**
 - Ensure the area in which you feed birds is kept clean, to minimise the risk of spreading disease.
 - Set up a feeding station up high, away from predators such as cats.
 - Don't offer food every day.

About Healthy Wildlife

The 'Healthy Wildlife Healthy Lives' – A One Health project aims to educate the public about people's interaction with wildlife in urban areas, particularly how people and domestic animals spread diseases to wildlife, such as birds, quenda (bandicoots), native fish, bobtails and kangaroos. The project informs people about how to avoid harm to wildlife, create positive interactions with wildlife and protect and conserve the environment. The aim is to keep wildlife healthy for a healthier world.

The project is a partnership between Eastern Metropolitan Regional Council and Murdoch University, supported by Lotterywest.

VISIT: www.healthywildlife.com.au

