

# FACTSHEET

## Living With Wildlife



### Wildlife Habitat Is All Around Us

Those of us in Australia are lucky to live in an environment rich with an array of diverse and unique wildlife. More than 80% of our plants, mammals, reptiles and frogs are unique to Australia and are found nowhere else in the world. Native wildlife is a huge part of Australia's culture. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander's deep connection to Country is ancestral, spiritual and social.

Australian wildlife live all around and amongst us, across urban and rural environments. As a result, it is important to understand how to co-exist with the resident wildlife species we share the environment with. Native species such as magpies, rainbow lorikeets, possums, lizards and snakes are commonly found around our homes, and there are several easy ways to provide safer spaces in our backyards and gardens.

Native wildlife is vital to Australia's ecosystems. All native birds, reptiles, amphibians, and mammals are protected in NSW by the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016 and federally by the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.

### Companion Animals and Native Wildlife

Domesticated cats and dogs are beloved companions in many Australian households. However, their innate hunting instinct can pose a significant threat to wildlife. With millions of companion animals and a substantial population of free-living and free-roaming cats and dogs in Australia, managing domesticated companion animals responsibly is essential to minimise harm to native wildlife.

Every domesticated cat and dog deserves a safe and loving home. Responsible management of companion animals can help them and wildlife coexist harmoniously. Here are some steps you can take:

- **Keep your companion animals indoors at night:** Many species of wildlife are nocturnal and are most active at night. Cats, particularly, should be kept indoors at night.
- **Safe outdoor spaces:** If you have a yard, consider creating separate areas for companion animals and wildlife, such as fully enclosed cat runs or enclosures.
- **Identification:** Always identify your companion animals with collars, tags, and microchips. For cats, adding collar bells can help alert wildlife to their presence.
- **Spaying/Neutering:** De-sex your companion animals to prevent unwanted litters and reduce the impact of free-roaming and free-living domesticated species on wildlife.

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### Feeding Wildlife

It is not recommended to feed wildlife for the following reasons:

- Human food does not support a nutritionally balanced diet for wildlife and can make them sick. Processed seeds, bread and other foods that are not part of an animal's natural diet can result in deficiencies that can significantly impact their ability to survive and thrive in the wild, and they can become vulnerable to predation and other threats.
- It can encourage wildlife to seek out humans, which is dangerous for animals and people. Animals that expect to be fed by people can engage in risky behaviours, harassing people for food when they are hungry.
- It can change natural behaviours. Animals that people feed may lose their ability to forage for natural foods and to be able to cope by themselves in the wild.
- Hand-feeding can result in the transfer of illness to and from the animal.

What you can do, however, is leave shallow bowls of water around for animals to use. Bowls should be placed at varying ground levels (including in trees) with a rock in the middle or a ramp of sticks so the animal can get in and out if needed. Make sure the container is not metal (as it will get too hot). Clean it thoroughly before use, and provide fresh water every day.

### Reporting Injured Wildlife

If you discover a sick, injured, or orphaned native animal on your property, keep pets and people away to reduce stress on the animal. Contact your local wildlife rescue organisation for guidance and assistance. Native animals that have had contact with the saliva of cats and dogs need to receive vet assessment and antibiotics, even if they appear unharmed.

To contact WIRES, call 1300 094 737.

### Becoming a Wildlife Carer

Every day, WIRES receives hundreds of calls for wildlife needing assistance. This can be due to the devastating impacts of habitat destruction and fragmentation, roads and higher vehicle speeds, cat and dog attacks, climate change and extreme weather events, entanglement in discarded rubbish or inappropriate netting.

If you'd like to help rescue or care for sick, injured or orphaned wildlife, consider contacting your local wildlife rehabilitation group for information on getting involved.

To review opportunities to join WIRES, please visit <https://www.wires.org.au/training>