



Education

ANNETTE COOK

Scarlet Honeyeater. Photo: Terry Evans

BIRDS, BIODIVERSITY AND BACKYARDS

Bird watching provides an opportunity to learn about biodiversity in our own backyards. Bird watchers would agree that birds are the most obvious of urban wildlife and that you don't need to travel far to get a decent list of birds. This makes urban areas, where population is highest, ideal places to start educating people, adults and children alike, about birds. The birds seen may then provide insights into the biodiversity of an area.

The term biodiversity refers to all organisms living together in a community and, of course, is not confined to the birds, but also other animals, including invertebrates, and plants. The presence, or absence, of particular birds may tell us something about the health of a community, including the size and shape of habitat spaces. For example, the presence of insectivores probably indicates a good insect population or small birds in gardens may indicate a good planting structure, with shrubs, not just tall trees and lawn. Importantly, biodiversity is not only about the plants and animals in a community but the interactions between them.

The activities of BOCA members help increase the information we have about birds in urban areas. The records kept of birds seen in backyards can contribute to understanding of birds' needs, movements and any changes to these. Records can be listed and shared in a number of ways. Unusual and Interesting Sightings are reported in *The Bird Observer* each issue but records of all birds, mundane or interesting, may still be of importance.

Eremaea Birds (www.ereamae.com) is an online database built from lists provided by its members. It offers members the opportunity to keep personal lists as well as contribute to a global bird atlas. You will find a link on the Eremaea homepage to the Birds Australia Atlas Project (<http://www.birdsaustralia.com.au/our-projects/atlas-birddata.html>). This is an ongoing survey to which atlasers report their findings for specific coordinates. You will find information about how to register and correct surveying methods to use.

Beginners and backyard bird watchers can report bird records to the **Birds in Backyards** website (www.birdsinbackyards.net). This is a Birds Australia project that began in Sydney but is now collecting data from all over Australia. Survey results can be reported on the site after registering as a member. The site also has a facility for identifying birds and fact sheets for many Australian birds. To assist in improving backyard biodiversity it has information for gardeners for the best plants and design to attract birds.

There are other websites that offer advice for people who wish to increase the biodiversity of their garden. Four are described here.

Backyards 4 Wildlife (www.backyards4wildlife.com.au) is an Adelaide-based website. Most of the information is location specific but there are some great fact sheets to download with information about what different birds, and other animals, need in their habitat.

The Tasmania-based **Gardens for Wildlife** website (www.gardensforwildlife.dpiw.tas.gov.au/gfw.nsf) has advice on developing "wildlife modules" in your garden as well as information about species you are likely to see in your garden. It also defines and discusses the importance of biodiversity.

Flora for Fauna (www.floraforfauna.com.au) is an initiative of the Nursery and Gardening Industry that was started with a Natural Heritage Trust Grant. On this site you can use tools to design a garden for wildlife. Plants can be selected to suit the different localities and wildlife.

Life in the suburbs (www.lifeinthesuburbs.net.au) provides biodiversity and garden information for Canberra residents. Visitors to the site can download reports for surveys conducted for birds, frogs, reptiles, mammals and invertebrates. There are guidelines for developing urban habitat. A species database to help with identification of wildlife is coming soon.

BOCA also has some information brochures for birds in gardens, nesting boxes and the results of BOCA Garden Bird Survey.



Clockwise from top right: Willy Wagtail chattering. Photo: Ayden Doumstis
 Little Friarbird. Photo: Todd Lyell
 Musk Lorikeet. Photo: Murray Chambers

LYNDALE GREEN PRIMARY SCHOOL WATERWATCH, BIRDS AND BOCA

Lyndale Green Primary School is in North Dandenong, Victoria. It is quite close to one of the wetlands surveyed by BOCA for Melbourne Water. The school has been engaged with Waterwatch activities at the Heatherton Road wetland during 2009. Each term they added an extra dimension to their water testing programs. They have planted trees, learnt about frogs and, during term four, birds.

They started their bird discovery by joining up as school Stickybeak members early in the year. BOCA then delivered a class session introducing the children to wetland birds, based on the birds actually recorded during the BOCA surveys.

At the next session, four BOCA volunteers joined 75 students from Grades 5 and 6 at the wetland for a field trip. The students were divided into groups and assigned a BOCA expert. Each of these groups was further divided into small teams that needed to keep a record of the birds seen. Wetland field guides and laminated images of the most likely birds to be seen were used to help with identification. The children were very enthusiastic and were great spotters – pointing out birds for identification to the BOCA volunteers. The number of species seen for the morning was close to 30, an excellent result being just short of half the number seen during the BOCA surveys.

BOCA BIRD WEEK 2010

The theme for BOCA Bird Week 2010 has not yet been finalised but with the declaration of 2010 as the International Year of Biodiversity, biodiversity and birds are sure to be the major focus. If you have ideas for activities or resources for BOCA Bird Week please contact Annette Cook at BOCA (03) 9877 5342 or education@boca.org.au.

Encyclopaedia of Australian Plants Suitable for Cultivation

The Friends of the RBG Cranbourne and the Australian Plants Society, Victorian Region, are inviting anyone who is interested to come and celebrate the Completion of the *Encyclopaedia of Australian Plants Suitable for Cultivation* after over 30 years of enduring endeavour.

The authors Rodger Elliot, David Jones and the illustrator Trevor Blake will be present.

This Celebration will be held from 12:00noon on Sunday 14 March 2010 at the Royal Botanic Gardens Cranbourne in the Woodlands Picnic Area adjacent to the Australian Garden. It will be a BYO Picnic Celebration.

Volume 9 of the Encyclopaedia will be available from 1 February 2010 and will be on sale at the Celebration.

Please register your interest with Nicky by phone 0401 975 191 or by email apsvicsec@yahoo.com.au and check the APS Victoria website www.apsvic.org.au/ for more details.