

ACT and surrounds

Are you an avid or aspiring gardener wondering what to plant in your garden to attract native birds? The following guidelines are prepared by Greening Australia, an environmental not-for-profit organisation passionate about healthy and productive landscapes where people and nature thrive.

Bigger and brighter is not always better

A commonly held view of 'bird-attracting plants' is that they need to be spectacular large-flowering natives such as grevilleas, banksias and bright red bottle-brushes (*Callistemon* spp.). The nectar-rich flowers certainly attract native birds but these tend to be the large aggressive honeyeaters such as wattlebirds, Noisy Miners, friarbirds and lorikeets. Widespread planting of nectar-rich natives in gardens can lead to an over-abundance of these aggressive birds.

Unfortunately for the smaller nectar-feeding birds (honeyeaters, spinebills and Silvereyes), these larger honeyeaters are highly aggressive and intolerant of competition. Wattlebirds and Noisy Miners in particular will drive away smaller birds, even those that don't eat nectar (robins, thornbills and wrens). Some of the smaller birds are rare or threatened species that need our help the most.



The Noisy Miner, an aggressive honeyeater, benefits from an over-abundance of nectar-bearing shrubs to the detriment of small birds. Photo: Julie Clark.



A young Red Wattlebird feeds amongst the flowers of a non-local eucalypt. Photo Julie Clark.



Gang-gang Cockatoos eat the seeds of *Eucalyptus* species. Photo: Julie Clark

Bird friendly planting guidelines

The majority of native birds in the Capital Region don't feed on nectar or have it only as a small part of their diet. To make a garden more friendly for a wide variety of native birds you can follow a few simple guidelines:

- **Use locally native plant species.** These are adapted to our soils and climate, are frosty-hardy and drought-tolerant, and have evolved with the local native fauna; birds, mammals, reptiles and invertebrates.
- **Know your birds and what resources they need.** Birds need plants to provide food and shelter. See over the page for different bird groups and their requirements.
- **Diversity of plant species and structures will provide for the greatest range of birds.** Include trees, shrubs, grasses and wildflowers, and where possible, allow for important non-living habitat such as rocks, dead wood, mosses, leaf litter and even small patches of bare ground.



Habitat for ground-feeding birds such as the Buff-rumped Thornbill includes leaf litter, dead wood and native grasses. Photo: Julie Clark



The Brown Thornbill feeds on insects in dense shrubs such as the silver wattle (*Acacia dealbata*). Photo: Julie Clark

Insect-eaters

The majority of bush birds in the ACT and surrounds, particularly the smaller ones like Fairy-wrens, Fantails and Thornbills, are insect-eaters.

Plant insect-attracting shrubs and wildflowers, such as:

- Wattles, including feathery-leaved species (*Acacia dealbata*, *A. mearnsii*) and smaller shrubs (*Acacia buxifolia*, *A. genistifolia*, *A. lanigera*, *A. rubida*)
- Tea-trees (*Leptospermum lanigerum*, *L. obovatum*, *L. myrtifolium*)
- Blackthorn (*Bursaria spinosa*)
- Peas (*Daviesia mimosoides*, *Pultnaea* spp., *Indigofera* spp., *Hardenbergia violacea*)
- Daisies (*Chrysocephalum apiculatum*, *C. semipapposum*, *Leucochrysum albicans*, *Xerochrysum* spp, *Brachyscome* spp, *Olearia microphylla*)
- Bluebells (*Wahlenbergia* spp.)

Seed-eaters

Seed-eating birds include cockatoos, parrots, pigeons and finches. The finches mainly eat grass seeds and also use grass stalks to build nests. Plant kangaroo grass (*Themeda triandra*), wallaby grasses (*Rytidosperma* spp.), tussock grasses (*Poa* spp.) and weeping grass (*Microlaena stipoides*). Pigeons, parrots and cockatoos eat seed from grasses, wattles and other shrubs (see species listed above).

Nectar-feeders

To provide for the nectar feeders, plant only a few of the local small-flowered grevilleas (*G. alpina*, *G. juniperina*, *G. lanigera*, *G. ramosissima*). These dense shrubs provide shelter as well as food, giving small birds somewhere to hide from more aggressive birds and predators.

Large birds

Some of the larger birds, including magpies, ravens, currawongs and kookaburras eat reptiles, small mammals, insects and other invertebrates. A garden with habitat for reptiles and invertebrates will provide for these birds.



This male Superb Fairy-wren has caught a moth amongst native grasses. Photo: Roger Williams



Red-browed Finches eat seeds of grasses, flowers and shrubs and need to drink water daily. Photo: Graham Stephenson

Habitat

Trees, where planted appropriately in gardens, are essential habitat for birds, providing food, shelter and nesting sites. Local species include the eucalypts (*E. blakelyi*, *E. bridgesiana*, *E. dives*, *E. macrorhyncha*, *E. mannifera*, *E. melliodora*, *E. rossii*), Kurrajong (*Brachychiton populneus*), Native Cypress (*Callitris endlicheri*) and Sheoaks (*Casuarina cunninghamiana*, *Allocasuarina verticillata*).

Habitat for ground-feeding birds such as the Buff-rumped Thornbill includes leaf litter, dead wood and native grasses.

Water is a great attraction for birds, and a well-located and maintained birdbath will be used by many different species.