

WILDLIFE FEEDING

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1. State of Play

1.1 What do we know?

- ❖ Issues relating to the feeding of wildlife are closely associated with whether the feeding occurs in protected areas or backyards.
- ❖ No written policy currently exists to deal with wildlife feeding outside of protected areas. Feeding of dangerous species is covered under section 87 and 237 of the Nature Conservation Regulation 1994, and regulatory signs have been erected to provide prohibition of feeding in within the protected area (Burger 1997).
- ❖ The current legislation prohibiting feeding of dangerous wildlife is open to interpretation as the public does not perceive many of the species they feed as being dangerous.
- ❖ There is no solid research base on which wildlife feeding policies can be made. Most research conducted thus far has been largely anecdotal rather than scientific.
- ❖ Much of the literature available is unreliable due to bold statements of consequences caused by feeding wildlife with no scientific justification to back them up (Burger 1997). Similarly, assertions of the apparent benefits of feeding are largely without a clear research support.
- ❖ Despite a lack of formal policies, most Australian wildlife agencies are openly opposed to the feeding of wildlife in any setting. It is worth noting that this stance is essentially the opposite to most agencies and conservation groups from the Northern Hemisphere where wildlife feeding is actively promoted.
- ❖ Potential (and real) conflicts exist between wildlife agencies and commercial tour operators / tourist accommodation adjoining National Park's and other commercial operators over wildlife feeding and its impacts on both the wildlife itself and human health and safety.
- ❖ Numerous studies have found 40-60% of Australian households partake in some form of wildlife feeding (Jones & Howard 2001). Thus, despite general opposition by Australian agencies and conservation groups,

Australians feed wildlife at similar participation rates to Northern Hemisphere countries.

- ❖ Motivations for feeding wildlife in backyards include:
 - Compensating for the impact humans have had on the environment (Jones & Howard 2001)
 - Allows people to 'get close to wildlife', which is often rewarding for the person involved and provides a unique opportunity to get close to animals otherwise difficult to see.
 - This form of involvement may generate positive attitudes toward conservation.
- ❖ Many people who feed wildlife in their backyard admit to a level of guilt because of agency opposition, although feeders themselves do not see the act as wrong (Jones & Howard 2001).
- ❖ The primary concern of those both opposed and supportive of feeding in backyards internationally is that of the possibility of the animals becoming dependent on human-provide foods. Although relatively little research has been conducted on this topic, existing findings suggest that dependency is unlikely for most adult birds. Dependency may be an issue for juvenile birds (e.g., young magpies).
- ❖ Many species visit backyard feeding stations. In south-east Queensland the most common species are magpies, butcherbirds, kookaburras, lorikeets, pigeon species, brushtail and ringtail possums, bandicoots and in some areas wallabies (Jones and Howard 2001). See the table below for a more conclusive list.
- ❖ Conflicts between humans and wildlife have been documented in protected areas due to wildlife feeding. Moussalli (1994) found that dingoes on Fraser Island that had access to food from tourists, fisherman and dumps displayed aggressive behaviour towards humans in times of food shortage (Petrie et al 2003).
- ❖ In suburban settings, significant conflicts have often occurred among the neighbours of some wildlife feeders whose feeding stations may attract very large numbers of animals.
- ❖ Suburban wildlife feeding has also been implicated in decreased biodiversity in the vicinity of feeding due to the attraction of large numbers of large, aggressive and behaviourally dominant species.

1.2 Current Issues / Knowledge Gaps

- ❖ Scientific research/evidence is needed to validate the dangers that may occur to wildlife as a result of feeding, including:
 - Disease being passed on at communal feeding stations
 - Impacts of sometimes large concentrations of birds at certain sites

- Possibility of dependence on artificial food sources
 - Loss of smaller / less dominant species in the feeding vicinity
 - Implications of aggressive human/wildlife interactions by animals that have become used to receiving food handouts.
(Jones & Howard 2001)
 - Altering species migration patterns
 - Wildlife exhibiting 'pest' behaviours (begging, pushy)
(Petrie et al 2003)
- ❖ There is a need for a consistent, ecologically, legally sound and defensible policy on wildlife feeding due to the likelihood of community and politically orientated disputes, (Jones & Howard 2001).
 - ❖ Wildlife feeding is a crucial part of extremely large number of urban resident's lives. Given existing rates of participation, attempts to ban all forms of wildlife are likely to be highly controversial, unpoliceable and ultimately unsuccessful. Nonetheless, the magnitude of the potential concerns and conflicts require the provision of clear and understandable guidelines on how feeding may be conducted with least impact.

1.3 What is accessible?

- ❖ Considerable information on similar issues relating to wildlife feeding from North America.
- ❖ Basic articles on organization websites mainly expressing negative views to wildlife feeding, but not based on scientific facts.
- ❖ Information ranging from well written analysed articles to average quality documents with poor referencing.
- ❖ Extensive research on several of the dangerous species involved in human conflict, E.g., Dingo and Cassowary.

1.4 What is not so easily accessible?

- ❖ Very little information on how to feed wildlife appropriately.
- ❖ Information regarding wildlife feeding in unpublished university theses and agency reports.

1.5 People Involved in wildlife feeding

- ❖ Queensland Parks and Wildlife
- ❖ Wildlife care groups & nature interest groups
- ❖ Popular nature magazines
- ❖ Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland
- ❖ Environmental educators
- ❖ Conservation Agencies
- ❖ Ecotourism operators
- ❖ Ecologists

Table 1: Species commonly involved in wildlife feeding in Queensland (Greimel n/d *unpublished document*, Rollinson *et al.* 2003).

Group	Species
<i>Birds</i>	Laughing Kookaburra
	Pied / Grey Butcherbird
	Australian Brush-turkey
	Pied Currawong
	Parrots and Lorikeets (various species)
	Honeyeaters (various species)
	Bowerbirds (various species)
	Australian White Ibis
	Crows, Ravens
	Australian Magpie
	Australian Pelican
	Silver Gull
	Buff-banded Rail
Reef Egret	
<i>Reptiles</i>	Lace Monitors
	Blue-tongued Lizard
<i>Mammals</i>	Macropods (various species)
	Rufous Bettong
	Dingo
	Bandicoots
	Possums

2. Information Sources

2.1 Documents

Burger, E. 1997, '*Wildlife Feeding Report: Industrial Placement Report*', University of Queensland, Gatton Campus and the Department of Environment, Moggill, Qld.

Howard, P. & Jones, D, 2000, '*For the Love of Fur and Feathers: Wildlife feeding in urban settings in SEQ: preliminary findings*', Griffith University – Community Projects in the Year 2000.

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Jones, D. & Howard, P. 2001, 'Feeding Wildlife: An indecent obsession', *Wildlife Australia*, Vol 38, pp. 18 – 20.

Maroondah City Council, '*A guide to the hazards of feeding our native birds*', Brochure, Maroondah City Council, Victoria.

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Orams, M.B, 2002, 'Feeding wildlife as a tourism attraction: a review of issues and impacts', *Tourism Management*, Vol. 23 pp. 281-293.

Petrie, M., Walsh, D. & Hotchkis, D. 2003, 'Encountering wildlife without feeding', Land for Wildlife Note No. 20.

Rollinson, D.J., O'Leary, R. & Jones, D.N. 2003, 'The practice of wildlife feeding in suburban Brisbane', *Corella*, Vol. 27 pp. 52-58.

Sinclair, J. 2001, 'Park Management Crisis: Fraser Island Dingoes', *Wildlife Australia*, Vol. 39 pp. 12 – 15.

Skira, I. & Smith, S. 1991, 'Feeding Wildlife in National Parks', 5th Australasian Regional Seminar on National Parks and Wildlife Management, Tasmania, pp. 182 – 187.

Stanley, J. & Seipen, G. 1996, 'Please.....don't feed the animals', *Ranger*, No. 35, pp. 22- 24.

2.2 Websites

Bird Health, with Dr Rob Marshall www.birdhealth.com.au/Urban/

Overview of Wild Bird Feeding (Wild Bird Centers) <http://birdware.com>
The Dangers of Feeding lorikeets (NSW NPWS)
www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/npws.nsf/Content/

The Birds in Your Garden (RSPB) www.rspb.org.uk

National Bird-Feeding Association www.birdfeeding.org

Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology <birds.cornell.edu>

British Trust for Ornithology <www.bto.org/gbw/BIRDS_FEED>