

FEEDING BIRDS AT HOME

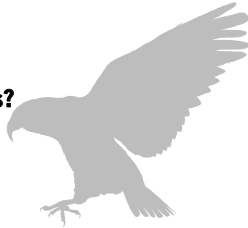
A GUIDE FOR NATURE LOVERS

If you enjoy the sights and sounds of wild, native birds in your garden, and want to contribute to their remarkable return to Wellington, this fact sheet is for you.

Beyond the safety of Zealandia's fence our native wildlife faces many challenges. Those of us with gardens can make wise choices and avoid dangerous actions that put these wild birds at risk – creating a beautiful, safe and rich habitat for birds and other fauna.

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

1. How can I see more birds in my garden?
2. What are the problems with feeding birds?
3. Doesn't Zealandia feed birds?
4. Should I stop using my bird feeder?
5. How can I feed birds safely?



Brendon Doran

I. How can I see more birds in my garden?

Keep it simple – think 'natural' and 'safe'. Your garden will be a bird haven when it offers a range of native plants and when predators are kept at bay. It needn't be a jungle – clever use of water features will provide hours of bird-watching entertainment.



Bill Beate

PLANT NATIVES

Birds eat a range of foods, including insects and fruit. When you plant your garden with natives, which flower and fruit at different times of the year, you provide wonderful natural resources for birds and other animals. Native plants are the foundation of New Zealand's natural environment and many are already threatened or rare – so they need a helping hand too.

Look for locally-sourced native plants. They are most adapted to local conditions, grow well and thus flower and fruit better than plants from elsewhere and require less maintenance.

For advice on planting see doc.govt.nz and the handy guide from Greater Wellington: gw.govt.nz/native-plant-guide/ or the Planting Natives brochure at www.wellington.govt.nz.



Forest & Bird

TRAP PESTS

Create a true sanctuary in your garden by trapping mammalian predators on your property. It's a powerful way to support local and national pest control. For more information, get in touch with your nearest restoration group. See www.naturespace.org.nz.

You can purchase traps for pests (such as rats and stoats). Go to www.predatortraps.com, www.goodnature.co.nz and www.halo.org.nz. Note: it is very important to set traps properly – please make sure to get all the information you need before setting your trap.

INTRODUCE A BIRD BATH

You'll soon find out that many birds will use a bird bath, especially in summer. Watching them splash about can be very entertaining!

Make sure the area is not accessible to cats, yet still easy for you to clean and refill. Rinse and scrub it regularly to stop the build up of germs which might hurt the birds, or you.



2. What are the problems with feeding birds?

Although bird feeding is well-intentioned, you can cause a lot of problems – both for the birds and for yourself.

INAPPROPRIATE FOOD CAN CAUSE ILLNESS / DEATH

- Food can contain toxins which harm birds and their chicks.
- Toxins may develop if food goes off in the feeder or on the ground around it.
- The food may not contain the right nutrients for the bird.

Peanuts and walnuts may contain fungal toxins called aflatoxins. In low doses these can affect fertility and immunity and in high doses can cause liver and kidney failure. **Sunflower seeds** can cause obesity and feather loss. **Bread** is highly processed and a bird's digestive system is not designed to digest it. It can result in impaction in the intestines, dehydration and ultimately death.

The Nest Te Kōhanga, Wellington Zoo, admits a large number of kākā each year. A common finding is that the birds have metabolic bone disease due to incorrect diet. This happens when the kākā parents are fed inappropriate food, which the parents then feed to their chicks, causing major problems such as bone and beak deformities.

A kākā chick with bone deformities was found at Trelissick Park where it appears the parents had fed predominantly on peanuts.

FEEDING INCREASES THE RISK OF PREDATION

- Congregations of birds will attract predators.
- Feeding may change a bird's behaviour, putting it at risk.

Kākā, tūī and bellbirds have been killed by cats and kākā used to being fed bread will be attracted to bread put on the ground for sparrows, increasing the risk of them getting killed by cats.

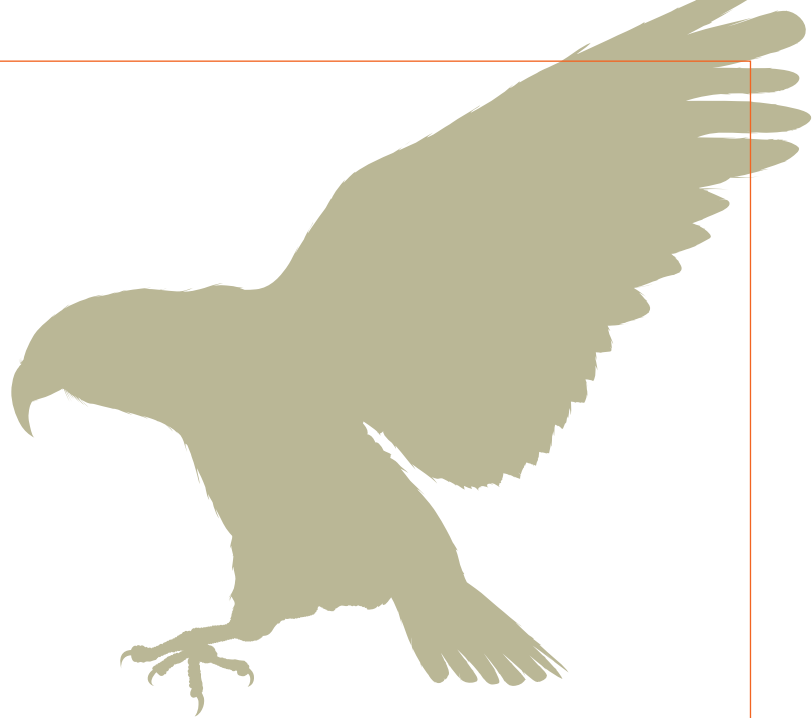
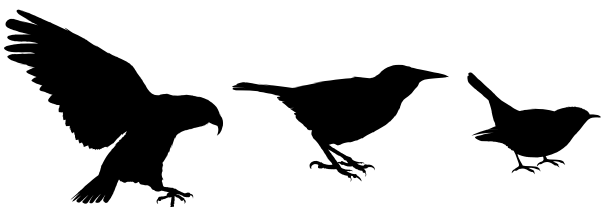
FEEDING CAN CAUSE AN INCREASED RISK OF DAMAGE TO PROPERTY AND BIRDS

- Kākā are curious and inclined to chew any object they might encounter, sometimes leading to poisoning and damage.
- Birds spending more time around houses are more likely to fly in to windows, suffering injury or death.

Lead is malleable and reported to have a sweet taste attractive to parrots. Many kākā now have detectable lead in their blood, and some have already died from lead (and potentially **zinc**) poisoning. This has implications for survival if exposure is ongoing – keeping them away from houses is the best protection.

Chewing treated timber which contains **arsenic** is likely to cause health problems for the birds as well as issues for the homeowner.

Kākā, kererū and tūī have been killed after flying into windows.



WHERE BIRDS CONGREGATE THERE IS AN INCREASED RISK OF DISEASE TRANSFER

- Bird congregations increase the risk of disease transfer between birds.
- Bird diseases can be transferred to humans.
- If hygiene is not maintained the disease risk is increased.

Salmonella in hihi on Tiritiri Matangi Island was probably transferred through the use of supplementary feeders; a **Chlamydia** outbreak in doves in Auckland was tracked back to a park where they gathered daily to feed on bread and **Pox virus** is a highly contagious disease proven to spread where high population density occurs at feeders.

FEEDING CAN INCREASE AGGRESSIVENESS, STRESS AND NEGATIVE INTERACTIONS

- Increased competition between birds at a feeding site can result in stress, leading to increased risk of illness and death.
- Feeding encourages birds to hang around humans. When they have all the calories they need they have lots of time to get up to mischief.
- When birds lose their fear of people, interactions can become aggressive if the expectation for food handouts is not met.

A kākā had to be transferred from Kapiti Island in 1997 because it became too confident and aggressive with visitors, and kākā in Wellington have bitten fingers when no food was offered.

Consider the kea in car parks which raid the bins, get fed by hand and then destroy the cars. Kākā are often active at night and can be noisy - leading some people to think unfavourably of them.

FEEDING CAN CAUSE AN OVER-ABUNDANCE OF UNDESIRABLE OR DOMINANT SPECIES

- Feeding birds can lead to an unnaturally large population of a species, having negative impacts.

Starlings have been responsible for the deaths of smaller birds such as bellbirds, tomtits and robins. Tūī are aggressive and have been responsible for excluding other species from food resources and causing the deaths of saddlebacks and other small birds.

Urban ducks are often fed to a point where they breed in numbers far in excess of natural food supply and become a public nuisance.

3. Doesn't Zealandia feed birds?

At Zealandia we put out supplementary food for kākā, kākāriki, hihi, bellbird, pāteke and takahē.

The feeders encourage our endangered birds to nest inside the safety of the sanctuary valley, they provide observation hotspots to help us monitor our populations, and they make it easier for our visitors to see these remarkable species.

Zealandia feeders are safe from mammalian pests, cleaned and refilled daily by volunteers, and the supplementary food in them has been carefully researched and is a nutritious supplement to the bounty of natural food sources growing in and around the valley.



4. Should I stop using my bird feeder?

It's up to you. This fact sheet has been provided to help you make informed choices, enabling you to get the most enjoyment from your garden by making it a safe and supportive natural environment. The birds will not starve if you stop feeding them.

5. How can I feed birds safely?

If you already feed the birds in your garden and are reluctant to stop you can reduce risk by following these guidelines.

Note: it is wise to consider the effect on your neighbours – kākā are often active at night and can be noisy!

FEEDER LOCATION

- Consider not feeding kākā if your house has lead nails or has balconies made of treated timber as these are a poison risk if chewed.
- Place any feeders in a safe place where birds can't be caught by cats, e.g. on a stand over 1.8m high.
- Place feeders away from buildings to discourage kākā from hanging out on the roof and chewing on lead flashings and nails or treated timber balconies.
- If you notice aggression between birds, consider erecting a second feeder, or discontinuing the feeding. You could provide a bird bath instead, located away from potential predators.
- Place feeders away from windows so birds don't fly into them accidentally if they get a fright.
- Consider using special films on windows to reduce the risk of bird strike. WindowAlert film alternately reflects and transmits UV light so windows appear more solid to birds. See: www.projectkereru.org.nz/preventing-window-strike.
- Awnings over large windows reduce reflection of trees. Beads and etching are also useful to reduce window impacts.

MATERIALS

- Use heavy dishes for food so they won't tip over easily. Ensure that dishes are not used for any other purpose.
- Use a dedicated brush to clean feeder stands and perches that the birds use regularly.
- Use untreated timber for feeder bases and perches if possible so there is no risk to kākā if they chew them.
- Use dry, rodent-proof containers for food and a cool, dry place to store them.
- Consider purchasing some binoculars to help view and monitor the birds.

FOODS

Use appropriate foods for the species, e.g. high quality parrot pellets or fresh fruit for kākā, fruit skewers for silvereyes and tūī.

Sugar water (1/4 - 1/2 cup of brown or raw sugar in 1L water) is a useful supplement for nectivores such as kākā, tūī and bellbirds. A nutritious food for nectivores is Wombaroo 'Lorikeet and Honeyeater Food'. Available through KarinWiley@clear.net.nz.

FOODS TO AVOID

- Honey water
- Bread
- Corn
- Peanuts
- Sunflower seeds
- Walnuts
- Junk food (no chips!)
- Too much of anything
- Mouldy food

HEALTHIER CHOICES

- Fruit and parrot pellets for kākā
 - Sectioned fruit for nectivores
 - Sugar water / nectivore food for nectivores
 - Seed for seed-eaters – note: these are mostly non-native species
- ...all with a suitable location and using hygienic procedures.

FEEDING PROCEDURE AND HYGIENE

- Proper hygiene is essential and shade preferable. Clean dishes daily with hot soapy water to prevent disease.
- Replace sugar water or nectivore food daily. Remove uneaten fruit to prevent disease and mould. Do not discard leftovers on the ground as mould can build up and pose a risk.
- Remove food if there are no birds, and don't leave food out overnight - to avoid consumption or contamination by rodents.
- Clean feeder stands and perches with a dedicated brush. With congregations of birds the risk of disease is increased.
- Limit feeding time each day. Feed once or twice a day at a time when you will get the most enjoyment from seeing them and when the noise will be least bothersome.
- Watch out for dominating species such as tui and starlings. They can become aggressive – see Feeder location.

RECORD BIRD SIGHTINGS

Watch for banded birds and rare species and report them to us at www.visitzealandia.com/reportabird or at www.naturewatch.org.nz.

THE INFORMATION IN THIS FACTSHEET HAS BEEN ENDORSED BY:



ZEALANDIA: THE KARORI SANCTUARY EXPERIENCE JUST MINUTES FROM TOWN YET A WORLD APART

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