

BIRDS OF CAIRNS GARDENS

What Will You See?

Birds in Cairns gardens vary in size from the diminutive Olive-backed Sunbird to Australian White Ibis. We are lucky to have such a wide range of birdlife and in this brochure we hope to introduce some of the more common species and give ideas on attracting them to your garden.

Some birds will be seen in just about every garden but others are more specialised. Almost everyone who lives in the foothills or near rainforest will have had an Australian Brush-turkey in their garden at some time. Perhaps not the most welcome of birds when they rearrange mulch to make their nest mounds! But other rainforest birds like the Emerald Dove are lovely to watch as they wander around the garden.

Some birds migrate from southern Australia or New Guinea and are only here part of the year. Others are attracted by food - usually nectar, seed or fruits - then disappear again.

Birdscaping Your Garden

Cairns still has much natural bushland and by extending and reproducing this habitat in your garden it is possible to attract a large variety of bird species. Lawn areas tend to attract introduced birds like Common Myna and House Sparrow. Native birds need vegetation for protection, nesting and food. Planting suitable trees and shrubs, especially native ones, develops an attractive habitat for them. In return their presence gives much pleasure and a very efficient means of insect control as well as helping pollinate many plants.

Growth is fast in this tropical climate and within 6-12 months it is possible to have an attractive garden for the owners and the birds. Many native plants have beautiful foliage and flowers and local nurseries can advise on native plants suitable for your garden.

Waterworks

Birds need water to drink and also for bathing and preening to keep their feathers in good shape. A shallow dish on a platform 1½ -2m from the ground, near a shrub for perching and cover, gives endless hours of fun watching the birds bathe. Once they find the water and start using it they will keep coming back, even when it is raining! In ponds, water must be circulated to avoid mosquitos breeding but if you have a creek running through your garden, a small dam to

form a pool would be suitable. Place birdbaths and bird-attracting plants carefully to avoid flight paths, as window strike can be dangerous for your garden birds.

Honeyeaters

Honeyeaters often visit gardens that offer plenty of nectar.

Graceful Honeyeater - Small, olive-green with yellow ear patch behind the eye. Most common call is “plik” often repeated. Usually associated with rainforest and mangroves.

Yellow-spotted Honeyeater - Looks similar to Graceful Honeyeater but slightly larger with loud piercing call.

Yellow Honeyeater - Medium size, yellow all over. Loud whistling call. Tends to be aggressive and nervous at the birdbath.

Brown Honeyeater - Small brown bird with yellow in the wing and yellow or white behind the eye. A bright varied songster, often first to call in the morning.

Dusky Honeyeater - Small uniform chocolate brown. Noisy call (sounds like a squeaky toy!), tends to squabble and chase a lot.

Other honeyeaters include Macleay’s Honeyeater (rainforest specialist), White-throated Honeyeater (woodland, eucalypts) and Brown-backed Honeyeater. Friarbirds (“leatherheads”) are large honeyeaters with a loud raucous call and can empty your birdbath in one sitting!

Olive-backed Sunbirds (sometimes wrongly called honeybirds or hummingbirds) feed on nectar but are not part of the honeyeater family. The male has a smart blue-black bib contrasting with his yellow breast, the female and young males have all-yellow breasts. This sociable little bird seems to be happy round houses and often builds its long, pendulous nest on verandas. Try hanging out a straight piece of wire or rope and see if Sunbirds will build a nest on it.

Black Birds

Cairns has no European Blackbirds, but does have native black birds.

Spangled Drongo - Large, sleek and elegant with a forked tail, heavy bill and red eyes. Very vocal, with a variety of hissing, rasping and cackling calls.

Black Butcherbird - Also a large bird, heavy and thickset with a large pale bluish bill, black-tipped. It preys on small birds,

reptiles and insects. Usually in rainforest or mangroves, where its melodious call is often heard. Young birds are brown.

Metallic Starling - Smaller than the previous two with a very sleek iridescent black body and bright red eyes. Juvenile birds have streaky white breasts and duller red eyes. They nest in colonies and zip around in flocks. They arrive from New Guinea to breed (Aug-March) but some now stay in Cairns all year, probably thanks to fruiting trees in parks and gardens.

Eastern Koel - Another migrant from Asia, a member of the cuckoo family. The male is black with a red eye and long tail, while the female is brown. It announces the Wet season with its constant monotonous “koo-well” call that can go all night!

Songs and Squawks

Being woken up at daybreak by a Laughing Kookaburra or Sulphur-crested Cockatoo isn’t everyone’s ideal way to start a day. However, many birds can serenade us with their beautiful song. Learning which bird is making the calls is a matter of watching and listening. Bird call CDs are available to help identification. Some birds are confusing as they have a number of different calls, or mimic other birds. Birds use their calls to communicate with each other: warning of danger, seeking mates or proclaiming territories.

Night Calls

You may wake up to strange sounds in the garden at night. Near rainforest you will probably hear the sound of the Orange-footed Scrubfowl, rather like someone screaming! Bush Stone-curlews live in more open grasslands and have a spooky, mournful wailing call. They quite often nest in gardens and lie prostrate on the ground if disturbed. Owls are generally seen in the area at night. Rufous Owls live in the Cairns Central Swamp and other forests near creeks, they have a low booming call. Barn Owls, Barking Owls and Southern Boobooks are found in more open woodland areas.

Produced by BirdLife based on the original by Keith and Lindsay Fisher (sootyowl@bigpond.com & www.birdwatchers.com.au). Bird names and taxonomic order follow *Systematics and Taxonomy of Australian Birds* by L Christidis and W E Boles (CSIRO, Melbourne, 2008).

WHO ARE WE?

BirdLife Northern Queensland

is a branch of the national organisation BirdLife Australia, formed in 2012 by the merger of Birds Australia and BOCA.

BirdLife Northern Queensland organizes both scientific and social activities. These include bird surveys, outings, workshops and presentations with guest speakers. The regular field trips and campouts cater for all levels of expertise from beginner to professional and emphasise fun as well as worthwhile conservation projects.

Members receive a quarterly newsletter *Contact Call* detailing local activities and also enjoy *BirdLife Australia* magazine dealing with national bird issues.

You can join BirdLife Australia and help the conservation of Australian birds at
www.birdlife.org.au

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Cairns Garden Birds

50 bird species that may visit Cairns gardens depending on garden features, season and nearby habitat
(*I" = introduced birds).

Australian Brush-turkey	Graceful Honeyeater
Orange-footed Scrubfowl	Yellow Honeyeater
Spotted Dove - I	Brown-backed Honeyeater
Emerald Dove	Dusky Honeyeater
Peaceful Dove	Brown Honeyeater
Pied Imperial-Pigeon	White-throated Honeyeater
Papuan Frogmouth	Helmeted Friarbird
Australian White Ibis	Macleay's Honeyeater
Straw-necked Ibis	White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike
Brahminy Kite	Varied Triller
Black Kite	Australasian Figbird
Red-necked Crane	Yellow Oriole
Pale-vented Bush-hen	White-breasted Woodswallow
Bush Stone-curlew	Black Butcherbird
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Spangled Drongo
Rainbow Lorikeet	Willie Wagtail
Double-eyed Fig-Parrot	Maggie-lark
Eastern Koel	Silvereye
Southern Boobook	Metallic Starling
Laughing Kookaburra	Common Myna - I
Forest Kingfisher	Mistletoebird
Rainbow Bee-eater	Olive-backed Sunbird
Red-backed Fairy-wren	Nutmeg Mannikin - I
Lovely Fairy-wren	Chestnut-breasted Mannikin
Yellow-spotted Honeyeater	House Sparrow - I

BINOCULARS

For a close look at birds a pair of binoculars is essential. Only some types of binocular are suitable for birdwatching, especially in low light conditions like rainforest. Prices vary from about \$300 to thousands of dollars for top of the range. Before buying, try out several pairs and see how comfortable they are to hold and use.

See also — Brochure No 3, Binoculars & Telescopes

For more about North Queensland birds, birding and bird conservation visit our website

www.birdsaustralianq.org

BIRDS of Cairns Gardens

Bird Checklist No 1



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