

A Guide for Temporary Support Feeding of Wildlife during a drought or after bushfire

Feeding wildlife is not normally encouraged. However during prolonged drought and following bushfires, many animals and birds may be weak and vulnerable as they are deprived of their usual water, food and shelter sources.

If vegetation is still available in the environment we do not recommend any support feeding of wildlife. Where vegetation has been entirely destroyed, and you have seen surviving wildlife, there may be a case for support feeding.

If you choose to provide food for wildlife:

- Only feed wildlife on your own property or properties that you have permission to enter
- Do not enter burnt out areas as this can be very dangerous
- Plan what you will feed, in what quantities and how often, and monitor how much is being eaten. Look for animals tracks and scats near the food (scats can be used to identify the species)
- Only place locally-sourced hay in cleared farm areas, never in bushland.
- Plan where you will feed so as to reduced opportunities for predators
- Do not place foods too close to roadsides
- Provide foods as close as possible to the animals' natural foods
- Provide water along with food
- Phase out support feeding as conditions improve (e.g. reduce frequency of feeding until it ceases altogether).
- "Wildlife balls" or "bait balls" should never be used.

Some possible unintended outcomes to consider:

- Animals drawn together can spread diseases to each other
- Predators may also be drawn to the food and predate the animals you are trying to support
- Feral and introduced animals (including rats) will also take advantage of food provided
- Introducing weeds in hay and grass into the environment
- Harm from animals eating inappropriate foods

What and how to feed wildlife

Kangaroos, Wallabies and Wombats

- Grass-based kangaroo pellets is the best thing to feed them (recommended: Wombaroo, Barastoc)
- Horse pellets (Recommended: Mitavite Economix. NOT high performance or anything with mollasses)
- Grass hay (meadow hay and oaten hay)

Ideally, pellets are only up to 15% of total diet offered, hay/grass should be the main food.

DO NOT FEED: Bread, grains and rolled oats or root vegetables (too starchy and rich for herbivores), or large amounts of Lucerne (protein levels are too high), brassica vegetables (cabbage, broccoli, kale, cauliflower).

For Kangaroos - leave pellets in mounds, and piles of hay in places where animals have been seen, where animal tracks can be seen, on forest/paddock edges and near water sources. Do not place too close to roads.

For Wombats - Leave piles of hay and pellets about 1.5 metres from an active wombat burrow entrance. Fresh scats and tracks indicate an active burrow.

Possums and gliders

The diets of brushtail and ringtail possums and gliders are quite varied. Offering a mix of the following will provide a sufficient variety for all of them.

- Fresh leaves and blossom
 - eucalypt, grevillia, melaleucas or any locally fruiting or flowering native vegetation
- Insect meal
- Sweet potato, pumpkin (small amounts)
- Apples, pears, grapes and berries
- Possum nectar mix

Place food in tree forks or trays elevated in trees at sunset. Older trees are more likely to house possums and gliders.

Flying foxes

As highly mobile flying mammals flying foxes will find food that is available. If you have fruit trees or flowering native trees on your property, they will find them if they are in the neighbourhood. Please do not put nets on your trees. If you must, use some fine mesh bags to protect bunches of fruit or branches, and share the rest with wildlife. Do not use dangerous netting – any netting you can poke a finger through will trap flying foxes and other animals.

If natural food sources have been destroyed by fire, the animals may be starving. Only on the advice of local bat carers you can provide:

- Fruit (apple, pear, rockmelon, watermelon, grapes. No Citrus) hung in feeders in trees or threaded onto wire.

Birds

Hanging baskets or elevated trays in trees with a mix of:

- Good quality bird seed and small wild parrot seed for seed eaters
- Wombaroo Insectivore mix, Good Bug Mix,
- Live or dried meal worms for insectivores
- Lorikeet/Honeyeater mix is commercially available for nectar and pollen feeders

Avoid placing large quantities of food in one place.

Do not place food on the ground.

For more detail on support feeding wild birds see BirdLife Australia's website

Dunnarts, antechinus, bandicoots and native rodents

- Dried mealworms, insect meal
- Finely chopped starchy root vegetables

Be careful not to attract their predators (dingos, foxes, dogs, cats) by supplying any large or conspicuous pieces of food: it is better to place it under logs where nothing smaller than a bandicoot is likely to reach. Water is essential to counteract the dryness of the food. If shelter is severely compromised, logs could be provided.

Koalas

Koalas are specialised leaf feeders and require between 200g and 500g of fresh leaves every day. Support feeding can only be done by collecting fresh leaves of eucalypts such as Manna gums and Swamp gums. However, doing this may deprive other koalas of food. It is generally not practical to support feed koalas due to the need for a constant supply of fresh eucalyptus leaves of the right type. If you have access to a large supply of the right kind of leaves from areas where there are no koalas, this might be an option.

Echidnas

As insect eaters, it is difficult to replicate their natural diet. Echidnas may be able to find enough food even in burnt out areas, as ants and termites can survive fires. Support feeding is unlikely to be needed.

Updated February 2020

So that we can improve this advice, please send any feedback you have on the content of this guide to: office@wildlifelifevictoria.org.au