

# AUSSIE BACKYARD BIRD COUNT

**2021 Results for  
Moira Shire Council**

Robin package



#aussiebirdcount  
aussiebirdcount.org.au  
**18-24 October 2021**

  
**birdlife**  
AUSTRALIA

## BirdLife Australia

BirdLife Australia was founded in 1901 and is a charity working to conserve native birds and biological diversity in Australasia and Antarctica, through the study and management of birds and their habitats, and the education and involvement of the community.

BirdLife Australia produces a range of publications, including *Emu*, a quarterly scientific journal; *Australian BirdLife*, a quarterly magazine; *Conservation Statements*; *BirdLife Australia Monographs*; the *BirdLife Australia Report series*; and the *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds*. It also maintains a comprehensive ornithological library and several scientific databases covering bird distribution and biology.

Membership of BirdLife Australia is open to anyone interested in birds and their habitats and concerned about the future of our avifauna. For further information about membership, subscriptions and database access, contact

**BirdLife Australia**  
**60 Leicester Street, Suite 2-05**  
**Carlton VIC 3053**  
**Australia**

### © BirdLife Australia

This report is copyright. Apart from any fair dealings for the purposes of private study, research, criticism, or review as permitted under the Copyright Act, and as outlined in the Terms and Conditions, no part may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise without prior written permission from BirdLife Australia. Results from the data analysis and the provided raw data shall not be provided to third parties and raw data is not permitted to be published. Publications where the data analysis or findings of this report are included in, or which utilise the raw data, must properly acknowledge BirdLife Australia as the data source. All enquiries to BirdLife Australia.

### Recommended citation:

BirdLife Australia. 2021. Aussie Backyard Bird Count 2021 results: Moira Shire Council. Unpublished report for the Moira Shire Council.

### Disclaimers:

This publication may be of assistance to the purchaser and every effort has been undertaken to ensure that the information presented within is accurate. BirdLife Australia does not guarantee that the publication is without flaw of any kind or is wholly appropriate for your particular purposes and therefore disclaims all liability for any error or other consequences that may arise from you relying on any information in this report.

This report is prepared without prejudice to any governmental or council applications or activities. The results published in this report are reflective only of the trends during National Bird Week as submitted by the public. Trends described in the report may therefore not be a true representative of actual bird trends within the area.

Published by BirdLife Australia, Suite 2-05, 60 Leicester Street, Carlton, Victoria 3053, Australia.

This report was prepared by: Karina Sorrell

# Contents

- Introduction ..... 4
- 2021 Aussie Backyard Bird Count Results ..... 5
- Count Summary ..... 5
- Data Limitations ..... 8
- Birds in Backyards ..... 11
- Rodent poisons are killing birds – How your Council can help ..... 13
- Birds in Schools ..... 15
- References ..... 17



# Introduction



In 2014, as part of BirdLife Australia's National Bird Week celebrations, BirdLife Australia ran the first ever Aussie Backyard Bird Count — now one of the largest citizen science projects of this nature in Australia. The Aussie Backyard Bird Count provides an opportunity for everyone — from school children, senior citizens, families and community groups — to become citizen scientists for one week every October. With over 85% of Australians living in urban environments with often limited opportunities to experience nature, the Aussie Backyard Bird Count is a great way to get outside and connect with nature.

The data collected by these citizen scientists plays a vital role in providing important information to BirdLife Australia. We know more about our threatened birds than we do about our common backyard birds and the Aussie Backyard Bird Count helps to fill this knowledge gap, as well as increasing our understanding of Australian bird species that live where people live. The Aussie Backyard Bird Count also helps raise the profile of bird species throughout Australia, highlighting their importance and promoting a national passion for Australian birds.

Each year this natural passion is confirmed, with the Aussie Backyard Bird Count attracting significant interest from the public eager to be involved and help contribute to our growing knowledge of Australian birds. Public involvement continues to increase each year the Aussie Backyard Bird Count is run, with the number of birds counted also significantly increasing each year. Additionally, involvement by local councils increases year-on-year with more bird-focused events being held during Bird Week, improving the awareness and importance of local birds within their communities. And with the release of lesson plans which encourages students to participate both at school and at home, the number of schools participating in the Aussie Backyard Bird Count continues to grow.

The national focus on birds is extremely important with data showing Australian backyards have been shrinking since the 1990s, and populations of some of our most familiar birds like the Laughing Kookaburra, have also declined. While data collected from the Aussie Backyard Bird Count is currently only a baseline, results from the past four years show that Australian backyards — in all their shapes and sizes — continue to attract a range of birds, giving us hope that even as the iconic Aussie backyard shrinks, many native birds can and do remain. Results from the Aussie Backyard Bird Count support the decline in kookaburra numbers over the years while aggressive species such as the Noisy Miner appear to be increasing. With growing national and international concern for the welfare of these iconic Australian birds, citizen science projects such as the Aussie Backyard Bird Count can help provide an insight into how Aussie birds are faring and results can help formulate subsequent management decisions.

**The next Aussie Backyard Bird Count will take place from 17 - 23 October 2022**

# 2021 Aussie Backyard Bird Count Results

## Count Summary

The following statistics summarise the results of the 2021 Aussie Backyard Bird Count for the **Moira Shire Council**. The count ran from the **18<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> October 2021**.

- **114** observers participated in the bird count.
- Observers recorded a total of **12,082** individual birds during Bird Week.
- **138** bird species were recorded (Table 1).

**Table 1:** Total count of all 138 bird species observed within the Moira Shire Council boundaries during the 2021 Aussie Backyard Bird Count.

\* Introduced species; RA = Rare; NT = Near Threatened; VU = Vulnerable; En = Endangered, CE = Critically Endangered (based on IUCN listings; BirdLife Australia, 2019).

Bird Species	Count	Bird Species	Count
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	1316	Australasian Pipit	12
House Sparrow *	885	Musk Lorikeet	10
Galah	852	Diamond Firetail (NT)	9
Australian Magpie	730	Fairy Martin	9
Welcome Swallow	687	Little Pied Cormorant	9
Noisy Miner	478	Pied Butcherbird	9
Superb Fairy-wren	473	White-browed Scrubwren	9
Little Corella	426	Apostlebird	8
Red Wattlebird	404	Black-faced Woodswallow	8
White-plumed Honeyeater	368	Oriental Dollarbird	8
Willie Wagtail	366	Wedge-tailed Eagle	8
Australian Raven	337	Freckled Duck (En)	7
Red-rumped Parrot	325	Grey-crowned Babbler (En)	7
Crested Pigeon	272	Helmeted Guineafowl *	7
Magpie-lark	246	Little Grassbird	7
Australian Wood Duck	236	Musk Duck (VU)	7
Common Myna *	236	Nankeen Kestrel	7
Common Starling *	223	Rufous Whistler	7
Common Blackbird *	217	Whistling Kite	7
Long-billed Corella	197	White-naped Honeyeater	7

Eastern Rosella	161	Australian Shelduck	6
Black Swan	159	Brown Goshawk	6
Noisy Friarbird	155	Collared Sparrowhawk	6
Straw-necked Ibis	141	Domestic Duck *	5
Pacific Black Duck	132	White-necked Heron	5
Superb Parrot (En)	125	Banded Lapwing	4
Blue-faced Honeyeater	109	Bush Stone-curlew (En)	4
White-winged Chough	104	Dusky Woodswallow (VU)	4
Laughing Kookaburra	86	Eurasian Tree Sparrow *	4
Zebra Finch	84	Masked Woodswallow	4
Little Raven	79	Yellow-rumped Thornbill	4
Australian White Ibis	76	Azure Kingfisher (NT)	3
Purple Swamphen	73	Black-shouldered Kite	3
Grey Shrike-thrush	71	Chestnut Teal	3
Crimson Rosella	62	Glossy Ibis (NT)	3
Striated Pardalote	60	Great Pied Cormorant	3
Silver Gull	51	Little Lorikeet	3
Dusky Moorhen	47	Square-tailed Kite (VU)	3
Great Cormorant	47	Striated Thornbill	3
Australian Pelican	45	Tree Martin	3
Rufous Songlark	42	Weebill	3
Silvereye	39	Australasian Darter	2
Masked Lapwing	37	Australian Hobby	2
Sacred Kingfisher	36	Black-chinned Honeyeater	2
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	30	Black-fronted Dotterel	2
Buff-rumped Thornbill	29	Brown Falcon	2
Brown Treecreeper (NT)	28	Brown Songlark	2
Red-browed Finch	28	European Goldfinch *	2
Dusky Woodswallow	27	Great Egret	2
Rainbow Bee-eater	27	Jacky Winter	2
Eurasian Coot	23	Little Black Cormorant	2
Plumed Whistling-Duck	23	Mistletoebird	2
Little Friarbird	22	Spotted Dove *	2
White-breasted Woodswallow	21	Tawny Frogmouth	2
Yellow Thornbill	21	Yellow-faced Honeyeater	2
Peaceful Dove	20	Barn Owl	1
Pied Currawong	20	Brown-headed Honeyeater	1
Grey Butcherbird	18	Cattle Egret	1
Grey Teal	17	Fan-tailed Cuckoo	1

White-faced Heron	17	Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo	1
Yellow-billed Spoonbill	17	Little Eagle	1
Australian King-Parrot	15	Southern Boobook	1
Brown Thornbill	15	Spotted Pardalote	1
Rainbow Lorikeet	15	Stubble Quail	1
Australian Reed-Warbler	14	White-backed Swallow	1
Fuscous Honeyeater	14	White-bellied Sea-Eagle (VU)	1
Grey Fantail	14	White-fronted Chat	1
Budgerigar	13	White-throated Treecreeper	1
Royal Spoonbill (NT)	13	White-winged Triller	1

---

# Data Limitations

An annual backyard bird survey occurring in gardens across Australia has the potential to be an extremely valuable monitoring tool for Australian bird species and communities. Over years, data collected from regions can be used to detect population trends for target species (both native and introduced), for different species guilds and for bird communities within specific areas. For example, detection of regional and/or national changes in the abundance and distribution of species especially those of management concern, such as downward trends of native species, or upward trends of pest species. Subsequent management actions can therefore be implemented in response to the survey results.

However, some caution must be taken when interpreting the results from such a survey. The backyards that are surveyed will not constitute a random selection of backyards across Australia. Previous analyses of surveys of a similar nature have suggested that participants are more likely to be interested in birds and have more 'bird-friendly' gardens than the country as a whole (Dunn et al., 2005; Spurr, 2012). If this is correct, the number of birds reported from surveyed backyards could be higher than the average number present within a typical Australian backyard. Additionally, bird species that are more likely to utilise habitat associated with backyard gardens are more likely to be recorded, thus represented, in the dataset than species that are specialised to other habitat types such as forests or water bodies. The lack of presence of these species within the dataset does not imply low abundance or scarce distribution but rather their specific habitat was not represented in the survey.

The number of counted birds may also be over-inflated due to the potential for observers to count the same bird/s multiple times during their 20-minute survey period. Furthermore, some regions may have small sample sizes, with some areas being under-represented (or not represented at all) which will influence data interpretation and population trends within an area and across the country. Survey results are also subject to temporal biases and only provide information of bird communities within a one-week period during spring. Hence, the Aussie Backyard Bird Count survey can be said to monitor population and distribution trends within the backyards of participants during the particular time period but results may not necessarily be applicable to Australia as a whole, or to the entire region specifically being analysed.



Furthermore, the GPS co-ordinates of surveys may not be completely accurate due to numerous factors. User error may occur when selecting their location through the app, as the placement of the survey flag may not precisely fall on their true location. However, the submitted co-ordinates will provide the general location where the survey occurred. Excluding user error, the accuracy of the GPS coordinates should fall within 5-50 metres as the app waits for up to 20 seconds to obtain an accurate GPS fix. If a GPS fix can't be found within this time, less accurate coordinates may be recorded. Being indoors, near tall buildings and heavy cloud cover can all lead to obtaining a poor GPS fix, or no GPS at all. Having Wi-Fi on and being near a Wi-Fi hotspot can give a fast, accurate result in most cases, but occasionally this can also result in a wildly inaccurate point in the case of a moving Wi-Fi hotspot. Most of the time this is not a problem or will be picked up by the user when they are looking at the map. If the app can't get a GPS fix and can't use Wi-Fi then it will fall back to using mobile towers, which can reduce accuracy to 1 km or even worse. The accuracy when submitting surveys on the website is much less predictable than the app. Most computers do not have a GPS so it has to rely on either Wi-Fi or the IP address. Wi-Fi can be quite accurate, but IP address-based locations are very rough – it basically just identifies which city you live in. If you are in a rural area sometimes it will just put you in the nearest major city/centre.

The skill and experience of observers conducting backyard surveys in correctly identifying birds will vary and also influence the validity of the survey results. The Aussie Backyard Bird Count app provided the first instance of minimising incorrect species identifications by clearly indicating to the user if a species that they had selected to include on their checklist was “unlikely based on survey location”. Once the survey data was collected in the BirdLife Australia office, data was further vetted based on species distribution information. While every effort was undertaken to vet the survey data of mis-identified birds, it is still probable that some misidentifications will be included in the dataset and caution is needed when analysing the results. However, a previous study has implied that identification of species occurring in participants' backyards are more likely to be correct as these species are familiar to the observer and are likely to be relatively common species (Cannon, 1999).

There's always more we can be doing to protect and encourage birds – which is why you're invited to get involved with some of our other programs.



# Birds in Backyards

With over 90% of Australians living in urban and regional centres, for many people, the only place where they connect with the natural world is in their own backyards. The loss of urban bird diversity has both ecological and human/cultural consequences. The Birds in Backyards Program builds knowledge, skills and practical support to develop action-oriented responses to the decline of bird diversity.

Underpinned by bird monitoring and habitat assessments, the Birds in Backyards Program encourages people to take conservation action for birds wherever they enjoy them – home, school, work, or local parks and reserves. We want people taking action for birds, informed by their own data.

The ultimate goal of The Birds in Backyards Program is a diverse urban native bird community, achieved by behavioural change through action research, education for sustainability and advocacy. Local councils can partner with The Birds in Backyards Program to achieve education and conservation outcomes for our urban birds – let's get our communities taking action together!



## What Birds in Backyards Can Offer

We are fortunate in Australia to have such a diverse and colourful range of native birds that live amongst us in the urban landscape. These birds provide an opportunity for people to appreciate and connect with wildlife daily and increasingly, research is linking biodiversity with a person's quality of life. **In Britain, bird life is so valued that the UK government uses information about their wild birds as a measure of the health of the environment as a whole.** This environmental indicator is published alongside more familiar economic and social indicators and reinforces the point that the maintenance of biodiversity is a key part of sustainability.

But our urban bird communities in Australia are changing. Small birds, like spinebills and fairy-wrens, were once more common in parks or gardens are now disappearing and being replaced by large and aggressive species like the Noisy Miner and Pied Currawong. Changes in our gardening practices and increasing urbanisation seem to be largely responsible for this – the simplification of our gardens and the loss of shrubs has removed important food, shelter and nesting locations. If vegetation in gardens could be managed to promote a diversity of native bird species, it will provide a valuable secondary habitat for conserving native bird populations, particularly as natural habitat continues to be destroyed. In the urban landscape, engaging with the wider community is necessary in order to turn around this habitat loss and provides a unique opportunity to engage large numbers of the general community actively in the conservation of biodiversity.

Birds in Backyards encourages people to learn in their own space in order to establish an initial connection with the natural world in a somewhat unnatural setting. It is not simply about providing people with information about birds in their local area, but it is about building on that initial interest and encouraging people to learn more and then take action for birds.

Our program takes a three-pronged approach:

**LEARN**  
about Aussie birds

**PARTICIPATE**  
in surveying

**CREATE**  
habitat and change



**Birds in Backyards can work with your council to provide resources or collaborate on projects. For example:**

- Hard copy materials such as A4 Backyard Birds of 2019 posters (that can be made available in 6 languages), bookmarks, bird trading cards, gardening advice brochures
- Train the Trainer workshops and associated materials or direct public workshops
- Ongoing monitoring programs for participants via our Backyard Bird surveys with feedback provided
- Children’s engagement activities and school resources – ask us about our Birds in Schools programs. Options available from fully supported to teacher-delivered

For more information, please contact Urban Birds Program Manager Dr. Holly Parsons – [holly.parsons@birdlife.org.au](mailto:holly.parsons@birdlife.org.au)

# Rodent poisons are killing birds – How your Council can help



While rodenticides are poisons designed to kill pest mice and rats, impact is much more far-reaching than just these pests. **Second generation anticoagulant rodenticides (SGAR) poisons in particular are the worst.**

SGARs work by causing internal bleeding, but when rats and mice eat baits poisoned with SGARs, they become poisonous themselves, harming, and even killing other animals and birds that eat them. Studies in Australia have found harmful, and often fatal levels of SGARs in dead birds of prey, including Southern Boobooks, Wedge-tailed Eagles, and Powerful Owls.

Evidence is also growing that suggests that rat poison is not only being eaten by the targeted rodents, but by reptiles (which have a very high tolerance), invertebrates and possums. This all means that **these poisons are moving far beyond the rodents they are targeting and impacting our native wildlife.**

These SGAR poisons have been restricted from public sale in parts of the US, Canada and European Union.

But Australian regulations lag behind and SGARs – including Talon, Fast Action RatSak, and The Big Cheese Fast Action brands – are available to purchase from supermarkets and hardware shops throughout Australia.

## What can Local Government do?

With responsibility for the maintenance of numerous properties, local government can reduce the amount of these deadly poisons entering the environment by changing your pest control practices and informing your residents. A number of local government administrations across the country have already taken action to become ‘Owl-friendly’ regions.

You can take action in your local government area by:

- Specifying preferred rodenticide treatments in commercial pest operator contracts (See next page for alternatives)
- Investigating conditions that could be included to assist with rat control in demolition licences;
- Distributing information about the impacts of second-generation rodenticides on birds and other wildlife to your residents.

## Change your pest control practices

Taking the lead and employing wildlife-friendly rodent control on all council-managed properties is the best way to demonstrate to your community that the council is committed to protecting wildlife from rat poisons.

If poison baits are required, place requirements on pest control contractors to only use first generation rodenticide products or suggest other alternatives. Look for active ingredients that are less harmful such as Warfarin (RatSak Double-strength) and Coumatetralyl (Racumin) and use products in locked bait stations.

### What are the alternatives to poison?

There are lots of ways to manage rat and mice that reduce the need for pest control interventions and don't involve poison. Local councils can provide information to businesses and residents on more responsible choices that will also meet local government health standards. In domestic settings, non-poison pest control – such as snap traps should be the first choice.

Property managers and residents can also be encouraged to:

- seal potential roof/wall cavity access points that rodents might be using
- pick up any fallen fruit,
- ensure excess pet food isn't accessible,
- rodent-proof chook pens and aviaries,
- replace rat-friendly palms with owl-friendly natives, and
- tidy up garden waste and limit access to compost heaps

Encouraging native predators also assists to reduce rodent populations. Tactics to do this include planting native trees, and installing nest boxes-for some birds of prey like Southern Boobooks to use as well as native prey like possums.

[You can see a list of rodenticide products available in Australia here.](#)

### Would your Council like to become a Hero in our campaign?

We are encouraging local Councils to become 'Heroes' our campaign by taking the actions detailed above. For more information get in touch with us: [conservation@birdlife.org.au](mailto:conservation@birdlife.org.au)



# Birds in Schools



Birds in Schools is a free environmental education program designed by BirdLife Australia and its Urban Birds Program. Available online through BirdLife's e-learning platform, Birds in Schools enables teachers right across Australia to deliver education and action for local birds with support from BirdLife Australia.

Birds in Schools engages students in the scientific process through investigation and monitoring the birds and habitat of their school grounds. Students use their own observational skills and ideas to develop and implement an action plan to help their local bird life. Action plans may include planting native plants, installing nest boxes or bird baths, or delivering education campaigns in their school or local neighbourhood.

## Birds in Schools offers students and teachers:

- The chance to become citizen scientists and actively participate in the scientific process.
- A valuable experience of connection with, and improved understanding of, the natural world.
- An opportunity to investigate real-life issues, reflect and problem solve and develop action-oriented responses to sustainability challenges.
- A supported, curriculum-linked teaching resource for Years 3 to 6, Stage 2-3, including lesson plans and resources, that builds students' knowledge and skills.
- A way to prioritise biodiversity within the school, with greener spaces improving the wellbeing of students too.
- The opportunity to collaborate and partner with the local school community and local council.



## Lessons and support

### **Birds in Schools consists of 10 lessons for students from Years 3 to 6, through which students:**

- Conduct bird and habitat surveys and contribute survey data to BirdLife's database, Birdata.
- Learn about local birds, biodiversity, and habitats.
- Analyse surveys and make recommendations based on their own research.
- Develop and implement an action plan to improve habitat for birds.

### **Support for teachers:**

- Lesson plans and accompanying resources supporting teachers to deliver content.
- Assessment for students to easily measure learning.
- Online teacher professional development and online lessons for students.
- Support from a BirdLife staff member including assistance and advice.

### **How much time does it take?**

The project is designed to allow schools flexibility of delivery. Schools can choose to deliver Birds in Schools over one term, two terms or more. There are 10 lessons with each lesson designed to fit into a 50 minute to hour-long session (although some activities will extend outside these times, particularly the action). The program is flexible and we encourage you to adapt it to meet your needs, for example, you do not have to deliver every lesson and we can assist with program adaptation if required.

### **Who teaches the students?**

Teachers deliver the lessons and are provided with an online professional training session with Birdlife to develop the technical skills and knowledge required to deliver the program, including in bird identification, conducting surveys, using Birdata and what actions help birds. A BirdLife Australia staff member delivers online Q&A sessions for students and are available for assistance and advice to support teachers.

### **How much does it cost?**

The program is free for schools to take part in. Schools may wish to secure grants or fundraise to enable the completion of action plans, such as planting native plants or installing nest boxes or bird baths.



### **Find out more**

#### **Website:**

[birdlife.org.au/projects/urban-birds/birds-in-schools-project](https://birdlife.org.au/projects/urban-birds/birds-in-schools-project)

#### **Email:**

Alexandra Johnson,  
Birds in Schools Project Officer  
[alexandra.johnson@birdlife.org.au](mailto:alexandra.johnson@birdlife.org.au)

# References

- BirdLife Australia (2019). *Working list of Australian birds v3*. Retrieved from <http://BirdLife.org.au/conservation/science/taxonomy> (accessed 13/12/2021).
- Cannon, A. (1999). The significance of private gardens for bird conservation. *Bird Conservation International*, **9**: 287-297.
- Dunn, E.H., Francis, C.M., Blancher, P.J., Drennan, S.R., Howe, M.A., Lepage, D., Robbins, C.S., Rosenberg, K.V., Sauer, JR., Smith, K.G. (2005). Enhancing the scientific value of the Christmas bird count. *The Auk*, **122**: 338-346.
- Spurr, E.B. (2012). New Zealand garden bird survey – analysis of the first four years. *The New Zealand Journal of Ecology*, **36**: 1-13