

## Maintaining or improving habitat values

### LEAVE THE MISTLETOE



Mistletoe is a parasitic plant that grows on a host plant, gaining its nutrition from the root and transport system of the host. Mistletoe is an important part of the ecosystem, providing winter nectar resources and fruit for bird and animal species. The Mistletoe Bird is a woodland bird species that is a mistletoe specialist, although mistletoe is used and spread by multiple species.

It is easy to think that mistletoe is an enemy, and can become very abundant on some individual trees and along forest edges. This is a reflection of where the woodland birds are hanging out rather than the “march of mistletoe” in the landscape. Research in our region has shown that the presence of mistletoe increases the bird diversity in the patches of bush.

So Mistletoe is good and a natural part of the ecosystem. Overabundance is a symptom of there not being enough trees in the landscape, and the lack of the natural predators such as ringtail possums.

### LEAVE THE ‘MESS’

The fallen timber, dead plants, sticks and litter that accumulates in revegetation and native vegetation areas – commonly referred to as “mess” - is a good thing!

As well as providing shelter from predation, messiness provides a breeding ground for insects and small reptiles that are an important part of the biodiversity, but also food for another suite of birds and animals. By having these elements of habitat you increase the diversity of species that will use the site.

Often people complain about wattles having a short life. Wattles are legumes and many species are able to colonise disturbed areas quickly, flower and set seed early and build a soil seedbank so that when the next disturbance comes they can again provide that quick cover. It’s their ecological role - embrace it!



A tangle of dead wattle branches is great shelter and nesting habitat for many small birds.

More information:

[www.sustainablefarms.org.au](http://www.sustainablefarms.org.au)



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## NESTBOXES AND ARTIFICIAL HOLLOWES

### When are Nestboxes useful?

- When you have animals that will use them (eg. Squirrel Gliders, possums, antechinus, phascogales, birds like owls, cockatoos and parrots, kookaburras... even wood ducks. Smaller birds like pardalotes)
- When there is a shortage of hollows in the area
- When they are maintained!



Studies have shown that nestboxes generally have a very low occupancy rate (E.g. 8% on the Hume Hwy) but keeping the boxes in good physical shape can make a big difference and where population growth of species is occurring and the hollows are limited, they can have much higher occupancy rates .

Just because there are no animals in a box also doesn't mean they are not being used. They may use them as temporary dens and not breed in them. Potentially nestboxes may be useful for bridging gaps between hollow-bearing remnants.

Undesirable animals can also use them, the most common being bees, black rats, starlings . Native animals such as goannas and kookaburras and Currawongs, and Introduced birds like Indian mynahs can target the boxes to predate on eggs and young so designing to reduce accessibility to those predators can be important. Rubber flaps over the front and manipulating hole size for example. Recent evidence has shown that although bees may occupy boxes they generally don't stay for long and that animals such as Gliders will still use them when the bees leave.



### What designs?

Hollow-dwelling animals are specific about what they look for in a nesting hollow in terms of dimensions (how big the box is) and the hole size. There are various publication about designs (see below) but talk to your local Landcare or wildlife group about what designs they are finding most successful.

- ⇒ Nest Box Tales. (<https://nestboxtales.com/>)
- ⇒ BirdLife Australia. (n.d.). *Welcome to birds in backyards*. Welcome to Birds in Backyards | BIRDS in BACKYARDS. Retrieved February 2, 2022, from <http://www.birdsinbackyards.net/>
- ⇒ Franks, A., & Franks, S. (2003). *Nest boxes for wildlife: A practical guide*. Blooming Books.



A lot of work is going on to create better thermally insulated boxes (E.g. using 3D printed recycled plastic, creating actual chaisaw holes in living trees and tools and techniques to hasten hollow formation).



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