

Bathurst Backyards for Wildlife booklet



Council Name: Bathurst Regional Council

Web Address: www.bathurst.nsw.gov.au

Size: 3,820 square kilometres

Population: 37,508



Abstract: The Bathurst Backyards for Wildlife Booklet is a guide for local residents who want to do their bit for urban wildlife. The booklet details over 100 locally native plant species with ideal habitat attributes as well as providing information about the numerous birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians that can be attracted to backyards, front yards and local farms.

Background:

Working with community groups was integral to the development of the Bathurst Vegetation Management Plan (2003) which sought to “guide community land management issues in a sustainable manner” with a focus on land under Council control. A community reference group was formed as part of the project and they continue to influence the implementation of the plan to this day.

In 2005, learnings from the Vegetation Management Plan process informed the development of the ‘Bathurst Guide to Plant Selection and Care’ booklet, which aimed to “provide guidance to local gardeners in planning and maintaining their gardens” and focused on exotic and native plants suitable for the local environment.

In 2009, members of the community were conversing with Bathurst Regional Council about how well things were progressing regarding the protection and maintenance of urban vegetation. However they felt that more could be done for native vegetation and urban wildlife. In that moment, the local ‘Backyards for Wildlife’ booklet idea was born.

Two community surveys conducted in 2010 and 2011 sought to understand what local residents wanted to know with regards to creating urban habitats, the type and nature of existing plantings, vegetation cover and wildlife already seen in backyards. The community told Council about what they would like to know, what they were interested in doing and what animals they wanted to attract. This shaped the content of the booklet.

Locally, such a source of information was not yet available to residents in Bathurst with people relying on documents designed for Australia in general, or coastal environments. The local Backyards for Wildlife booklet fills an information gap targeting local plants and local wildlife. As Bathurst was settled by Europeans in 1815, there have been extensive modifications to the local environment – many native animals have since disappeared. The booklet encourages the re-establishment of local flora which will help to reduce the pressures placed on local fauna species.



Implementation:

In 2010, Council identified a need to help fill the gap in urban wildlife knowledge but did not know what would need to be included, what the community wanted and what information would be most helpful. In mid 2010, Council conducted a community survey specifically asking:

- The types and size of yards.
- What proportion of yards was made up of lawn, paths, garden beds.
- The species and size, shape and number of plants that people had in their yards.
- What people felt was lacking in the urban environment; what was needed to attract wildlife.

A follow up survey in 2011 asked what people saw in their backyard including:

- Local birds, mammals, reptiles, frogs and insects and spiders and what plants attract them.
- How often these animals were seen in their yards.

After extensive research and consultation with local nurseries and leading local naturalists, Council developed a draft which was presented to survey participants for feedback. Council put the word out to the community for photos of local plants and animals: hundreds of photos were provided with over 95% supplied by locals. Improvements were made along the way and funding was sought to print the booklet.

It was estimated to cost around \$9,000 to print 2,500 copies. The BOD Alliance project 'Inspiring & Integrating Change' funded by the NSW Environmental Trust, had direct links to biodiversity objectives, so supplementary funding was provided to the Council for the booklet. Bathurst Regional Council contributed the remaining funds: the booklet sold for a small cost to cover updating and reprinting costs in the future. The development of the booklet will also help to achieve actions identified in the Bathurst Vegetation Management Plan, BOD Environmental Sustainability Action Plan and the recently adopted Community Strategic Plan.

The Backyards for Wildlife booklet was launched at the 2012 annual Bathurst Region Sustainable Living Expo on March 26. Copies were also provided for free to residents who contributed to its development. Since then, over 350 booklets have been purchased from the Bathurst Visitor Information Centre, Civic Centre and Library.

Outcomes:

The final production of the Backyards for Wildlife booklet, the first of its kind in Central NSW, was a significant achievement. Bringing together the knowledge and needs of the Bathurst community, utilising the existing resources available. The collation of the information into a user friendly format was a great outcome. With over 100 local people involved in the development of the booklet, there is significant ownership of the booklet by those involved.

By conducting community surveys Council has established baseline information regarding the common wildlife species found in Bathurst Region backyards. Council now also knows what a 'normal' backyard looks like in terms of paths, lawns and gardens. This is very useful information and will help Council track changes in time as, with improved education, we move to more sustainable garden designs.

The 48 page booklet included the following:

- What is wildlife and why is it important?
- What is a 'backyard for wildlife'?
- Utilising the five layers of vegetation
- Including natural and artificial habitats in your garden

- Considering fauna friendly fencing, pets and wildlife, vegies and organic gardens
- The urban yard – small to big / the rural yard
- An introduction to the wildlife of the Bathurst Region
- Local flora for fauna
- Local contacts, websites and further reading

The booklet is now available for sale at local Council outlets as well as being available for free download via Council's website. Council will continue to promote the booklet as a way for the local community to improve the options for our wildlife and build their own Backyard for Wildlife. The booklet will be updated in the future with feedback from the community to ensure that it stays relevant and meets their needs.

Future:

Though Council had long been involved in the development of strategic and community documents, there was perhaps not a full appreciation of the level of effort required to produce a booklet such as this. Besides the many hours of research that followed the community surveys, many more hours were spent sourcing photographs of local wildlife and plant species with every effort taken to ensure that the local community was involved along the way.

Council has been extremely happy with the process that resulted in the booklet's development. In the future, Council would again conduct community surveys as this was crucial to understanding what information was necessary. The buy-in from Council staff, local residents and naturalists both contributed to the success of the booklet.

Council will continue to receive feedback from the community and other councils so that when a reprint is necessary in around 4-5 years time, it can be updated with the relevant information, ensuring that the booklet evolves with the needs of the community.

References:

<http://www.bathurst.nsw.gov.au/environment/biodiversity/1484-backyards-for-wildlife-booklet-available-now.html>

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