

AUSSIE BACKYARD BIRD COUNT

2021 Results for
Ku-ring-gai Council

Brolga 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: Ku-ring-gai Council. Unpublished report for the Ku-ring-gai Council.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
- Survey Distribution 8
- Least Common Species 9
- Most Common Species 9
- Introduced Species 12
- Native Species of Management Concern 14
- Data Limitations 18
- Birds in Backyards 21
- Rodent poisons are killing birds – How your Council can help 23
- Birds in Schools 25
- References 27
- Appendix One – Introduced Species Maps..... 28



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 **Ku-ring-gai Council**. The count ran from the **18th to 24th October 2021**.

- **495** observers participated in the bird count, submitting **970** checklists.
- Submitted checklists ranged from between **1** and **21** per registered user (average of **2.57** per registered user).
- Observers counted birds for a combined duration of **308** hours and **17** minutes.
- Observers recorded a total of **20,494** individual birds during Bird Week.
- **111** bird species were recorded (Table 1).
- The reporting rate for individual species (percentage of total surveys a species was detected in) ranged from **0.10 %** (representing a single observation) to **75.98 %** (Table 1). Low reporting rates for species with high counts indicate that many birds of these species were reported within single surveys (i.e., seen in family groups or large flocks).

Table 1: Total count and reporting rate (%) of all 111 bird species observed within the Ku-ring-gai 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	Reporting Rate (%)	Bird Species	Count	Reporting Rate (%)
Rainbow Lorikeet	5725	75.98	Red-browed Finch	15	0.52
Noisy Miner	4058	71.13	Gang-gang Cockatoo	14	0.31
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	3454	70.41	Willie Wagtail	13	0.93
Australian Magpie	911	40.72	Wonga Pigeon	11	0.62
Laughing Kookaburra	797	41.44	Silvereye	11	0.41
Grey Butcherbird	524	29.48	Australasian Figbird	8	0.31
Australian King-Parrot	421	22.27	Superb Lyrebird	7	0.62
Pied Currawong	412	23.71	Pacific Baza	7	0.52
Australian Raven	308	16.8	Glossy Black-Cockatoo (VU)	7	0.41
Galah	296	11.65	Southern Boobook	6	0.62

Common Myna *	296	8.25	White-naped Honeyeater	6	0.52
Little Corella	293	5.05	Common Starling *	6	0.21
Australian Brush-turkey	287	18.25	Rufous Fantail	5	0.31
Welcome Swallow	229	5.67	Silver Gull	5	0.21
Eastern Whipbird	164	11.34	Australian White Ibis	4	0.41
Crimson Rosella	162	8.56	Brown Goshawk	4	0.31
Channel-billed Cuckoo	148	10.82	Grey Shrike-thrush	4	0.31
Crested Pigeon	144	7.53	Spotted Dove *	4	0.31
Eastern Koel	135	10.82	White-faced Heron	4	0.31
Little Wattlebird	108	6.39	Common Bronzewing	4	0.1
Australian Wood Duck	95	1.65	Dusky Woodswallow (VU)	4	0.1
Superb Fairy-wren	94	4.33	Little Pied Cormorant	4	0.1
Red Wattlebird	89	5.26	Azure Kingfisher	3	0.31
Masked Lapwing	70	3.2	Brush Cuckoo	3	0.31
Pacific Black Duck	68	1.24	Common Blackbird *	3	0.31
Eastern Spinebill	60	3.3	Yellow-faced Honeyeater	3	0.21
White-browed Scrubwren	55	2.27	Little Black Cormorant	2	0.21
Little Lorikeet (VU)	51	0.41	Rufous Whistler	2	0.21
Magpie-lark	49	2.68	Weebill	2	0.21
Rock Dove *	48	1.24	White-eared Honeyeater	2	0.21
Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo	48	0.82	White-headed Pigeon	2	0.21
Fork-tailed Swift	47	0.62	White-winged Triller	2	0.21
Eastern Rosella	46	2.89	Black-faced Monarch	2	0.1
Brown Gerygone	46	2.27	Domestic Duck *	2	0.1
Lewin's Honeyeater	42	2.58	Eurasian Coot	2	0.1
Bell Miner	41	1.34	Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo	2	0.1
Olive-backed Oriole	38	3.2	Noisy Friarbird	2	0.1
White-throated Treecreeper	36	3.09	Whistling Kite	2	0.1
Eastern Yellow Robin	36	2.68	White-throated Needletail	2	0.1
Brown Thornbill	36	2.06	Bar-shouldered Dove	1	0.1
House Sparrow *	30	0.62	Chestnut Teal	1	0.1
Grey Fantail	29	1.55	Collared Sparrowhawk	1	0.1
Topknot Pigeon	26	0.93	Fan-tailed Cuckoo	1	0.1
Oriental Dollarbird	24	1.75	Fuscous Honeyeater	1	0.1
Golden Whistler	21	1.86	Great Cormorant	1	0.1
Satin Bowerbird	20	1.75	Great Pied Cormorant	1	0.1
Dusky Moorhen	20	0.31	Little Eagle (VU)	1	0.1
Sacred Kingfisher	19	1.86	Little Friarbird	1	0.1
Tawny Frogmouth	19	1.34	Nankeen Kestrel	1	0.1

Powerful Owl (VU)	17	1.34	Purple Swamphen	1	0.1
New Holland Honeyeater	17	0.72	Rockwarbler	1	0.1
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	16	1.13	Scarlet Honeyeater	1	0.1
Brown Honeyeater	16	0.93	Striated Pardalote	1	0.1
Variiegated Fairy-wren	16	0.31	Swamp Harrier	1	0.1
Spotted Pardalote	15	1.34	White-necked Heron	1	0.1
Brown Cuckoo-Dove	15	0.72			

Survey Distribution

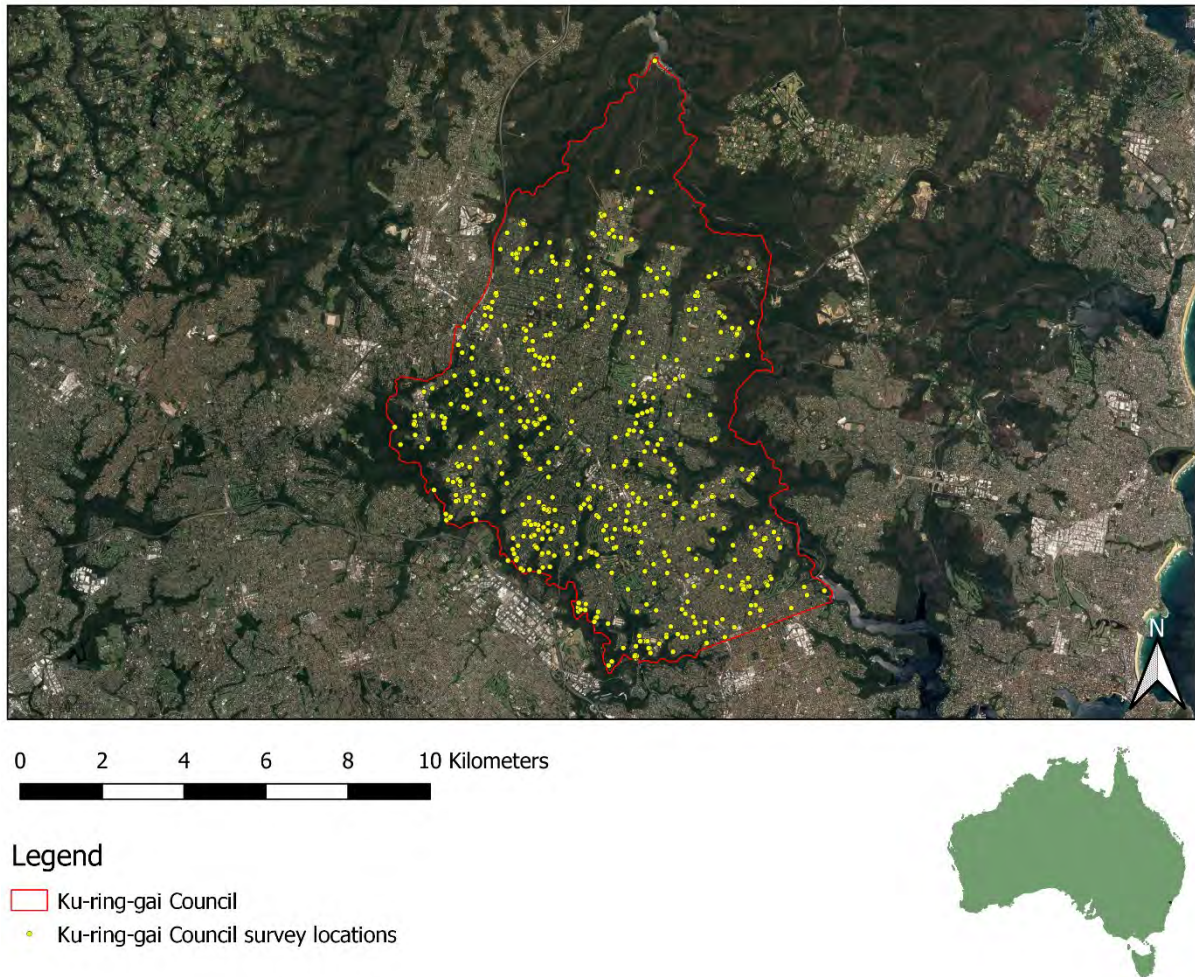


Figure 1: Bird observations recorded within Ku-ring-gai Council boundaries during the 2021 Aussie Backyard Bird Count. Bird observations that were recorded in a single survey overlap due to having the same GPS coordinates, so each yellow circle represents a single complete survey.

Least Common Species

The least commonly observed bird species recorded within the Ku-ring-gai Council boundaries all corresponded to one single survey observation and included:

- Common Bronzewing
- Dusky Woodswallow (VU)
- Little Pied Cormorant
- Black-faced Monarch
- Domestic Duck *
- Eurasian Coot
- Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo
- Noisy Friarbird
- Whistling Kite
- White-throated Needletail
- Bar-shouldered Dove
- Chestnut Teal
- Collared Sparrowhawk
- Fan-tailed Cuckoo
- Fuscous Honeyeater
- Great Cormorant
- Great Pied Cormorant
- Little Eagle (VU)
- Little Friarbird
- Nankeen Kestrel
- Purple Swamphen
- Rockwarbler
- Scarlet Honeyeater
- Striated Pardalote
- Swamp Harrier
- White-necked Heron

All but one of the **26** bird species reported only once are native to Australia. The Domestic Duck was the only species recorded just once. However, it is a descendant of the Northern Mallard and not truly a distinct species. Two of the 25 native species are classified as threatened in New South Wales. Four of the 25 native species are raptors, and seven are associated with aquatic habitats such as coastlines, lakes, and wetlands. The remaining species are typically found in woodlands or forests, away from the modified vegetation of larger towns. The behaviours and habitat requirements of these species may account for the lack of reports during Bird Week, especially if most surveys occurred in people's backyards. Very few surveys were submitted from the larger areas of forest in the north of the council.

Most Common Species

All but one of the ten most abundant bird species recorded within the Ku-ring-gai Council boundaries are native to New South Wales (Figure 2). The top ten bird abundances ranged from **296** to **5,725** individual birds (Figure 2). All birds in the top 10 species are considered to have secure populations in New South Wales.

The most *counted* species, the Rainbow Lorikeet was also the most counted species in the state and country. The second-most counted species, the Noisy Miner, was also the second-most counted species in the state and country. The third-most counted species, the Sulphur-crested Cockatoo was the third-most abundant species in the state, and fourth-most abundant species in the country. The remainder of the species in the top ten mostly had similar standings to the state-wide counts reflecting the similarity of the council's urban/suburban habitat to the other urbanised regions of

New South Wales (from where the vast majority of NSW surveys were submitted). The exception here is the Grey Butcherbird (6th), which was over-represented in the Ku-ring-gai Council, coming in at only 32nd-most abundant in the state.

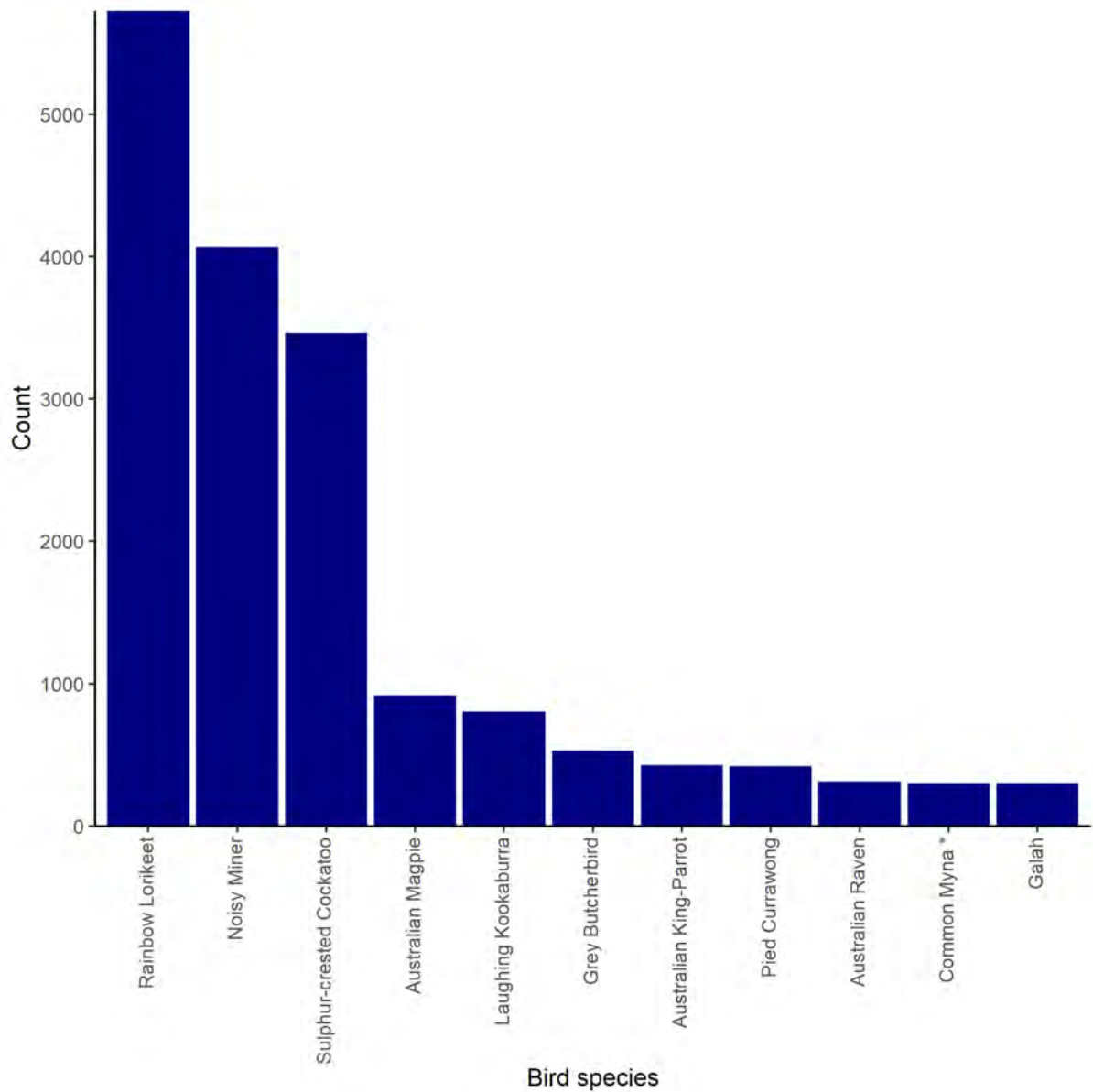


Figure 2: The ten most abundant bird species within the Ku-ring-gai Council boundaries during the 2021 Aussie Backyard Bird Count. * Indicates introduced species.

Majority of the ten most frequently *reported* species within Ku-ring-gai Council boundaries were reported at higher rates than both the state and national averages (Figure 3). The Australian Magpie was reported at slightly lower rates than both the state and national averages, and the Australian Raven was recorded at a lower rate than the state average, but a higher rate than the national average. Most notably, the Rainbow Lorikeet, Noisy Miner, Grey Butcherbird, Laughing Kookaburra,

and Sulphur-crested Cockatoo were all reported at particularly high rates compared to state and national averages. Both Rainbow Lorikeet and Noisy Miner thrive in urban environments with an abundance of eucalypts, conditions very common throughout the Ku-ring-gai Council. Both species successfully outcompete most other birds in these modified habitats, and the Noisy Miner is particularly common where understorey vegetation has been cleared (usually the case in suburban parks and streets). Grey Butcherbird, Laughing Kookaburra, and Sulphur-crested Cockatoo also thrive in suburban habitats with modest amounts of tree cover. The Australian Brush-turkey was also recorded at a high rate compared to state and national averages, mirroring the increasing spread of this species into eastern Sydney and Illawarra.

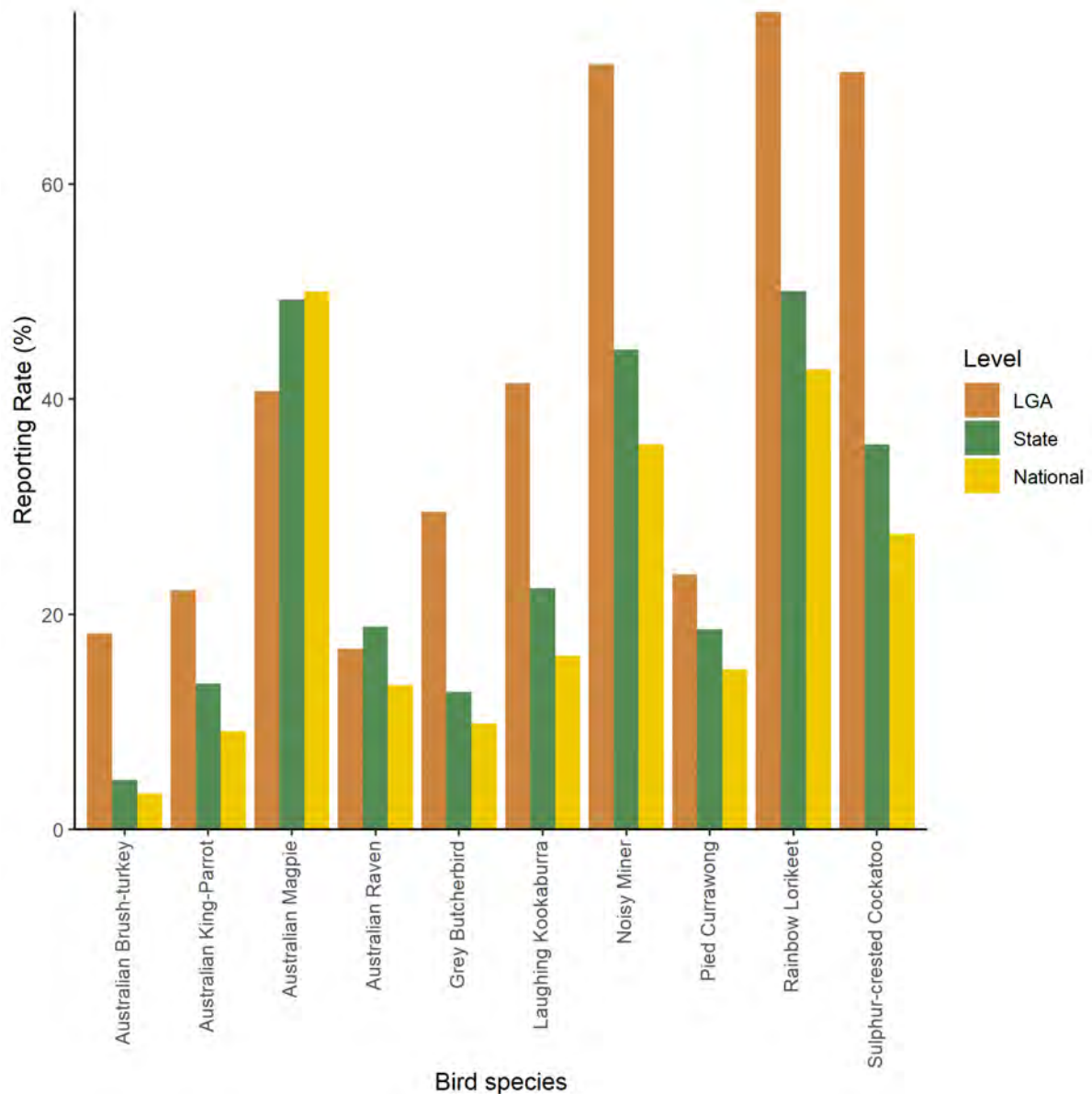


Figure 3: Comparison of the reporting rates (%) of the ten most frequently recorded species during the 2021 Aussie Backyard Bird Count within the Ku-ring-gai Council boundaries, with New South Wales and national reporting rates.

Introduced Species

Seven introduced bird species were recorded within the council boundaries during the 2021 Aussie Backyard Bird Count (Table 2, Figure 4). Introduced species records were fairly evenly spread across the Ku-ring-gai Council, yet there were very few records from the better-vegetated forests in the north (Figure 4). It should be noted that very few surveys were submitted from these forested areas, and the distribution maps are likely to reflect this survey bias.

The Common Myna (8.25 %), Rock Dove (1.24 %), and House Sparrow (0.62 %), were the introduced species reported in the highest proportion of surveys within the council boundaries. The Ku-ring-gai Council region had a relatively low incidence of introduced species records compared to many other regions around the country. Figure 4 gives an overall indication of introduced species distribution across Ku-ring-gai Council, but individual species distributions are difficult to discern due to the overlap of records. Accordingly, the individual distribution maps for each introduced species have been provided in **Appendix 1**.

Table 2: Survey statistics for the introduced bird species recorded within Ku-ring-gai Council boundaries during the 2021 Aussie Backyard Bird Count.

Bird Species	Count	Proportion of total individuals (%)	Number of surveys detected in	Reporting rate (%)
Common Myna	296	1.44	80	8.25
Rock Dove	48	0.23	12	1.24
House Sparrow	30	0.15	6	0.62
Common Starling	6	0.03	2	0.21
Spotted Dove	4	0.02	3	0.31
Common Blackbird	3	0.01	3	0.31
Domestic Duck	2	0.01	1	0.1

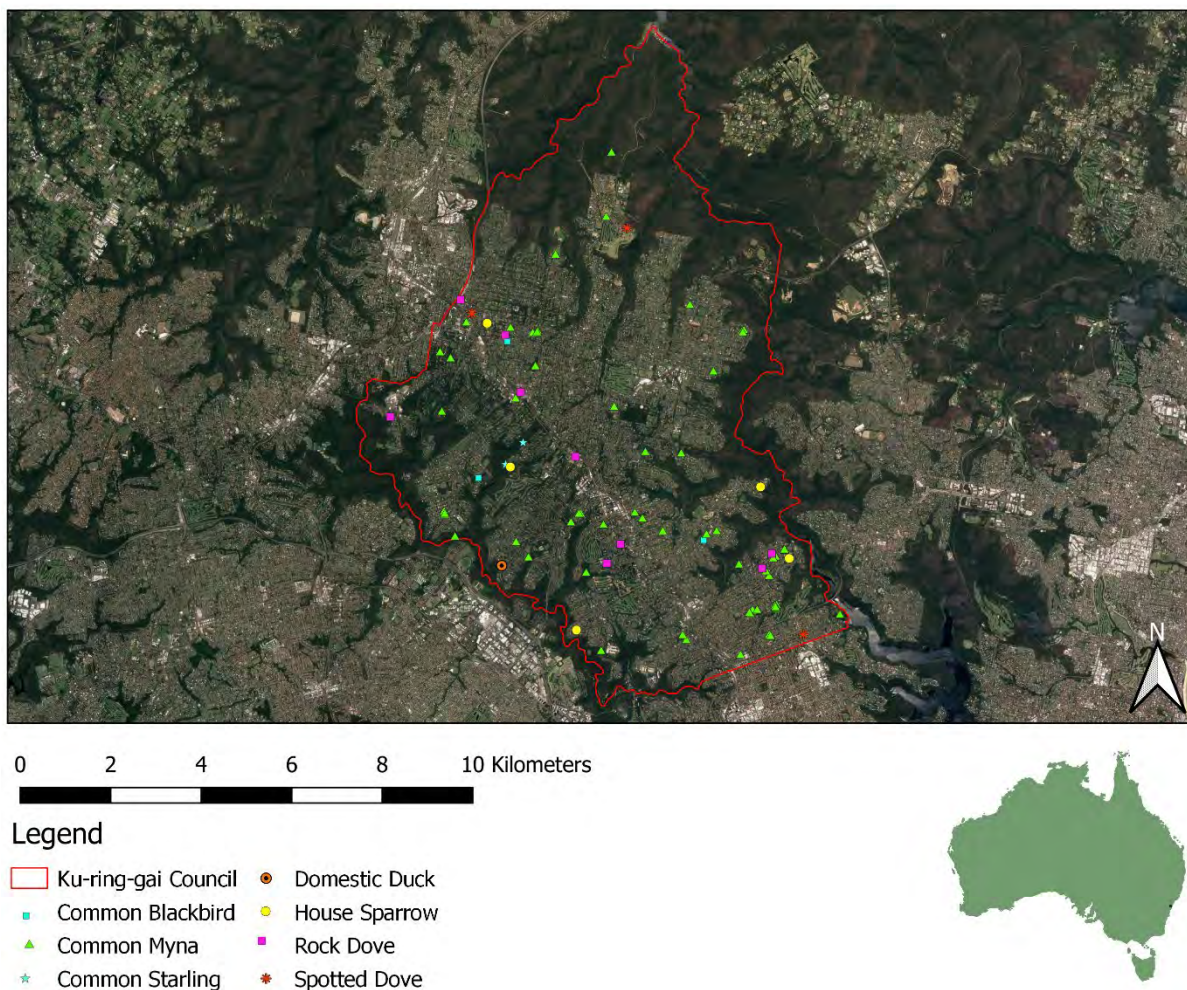


Figure 4: Distribution of the introduced bird species within the Ku-ring-gai Council boundaries during the 2021 Aussie Backyard Bird Count. Bird observations that were recorded in a single survey overlap due to having the same GPS co-ordinates.

Native Species of Management Concern

European colonisation has had a large impact on the conservation status of Australian birds. Approximately 234 species of Australian bird are now classified by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as Extinct, threatened with extinction, or Near Threatened (Garnett *et al*, 2011). It is critical that we gain an understanding of where these threatened species persist so that we can implement appropriate management actions in these areas. The Aussie Backyard Bird Count provides an opportunity for community members to participate in this important work.

Five species of bird listed as threatened were recorded within the council boundaries (Table 3, Figure 5). The Powerful Owl was reported in over 1 % of checklists. Figure 5 gives an overall indication of threatened species distribution across Ku-ring-gai Council. There was no overlap in threatened species records this year; accordingly, no separate appendix of individual threatened species maps has been provided.

Table 3: Threatened species recorded within Ku-ring-gai Council boundaries.

Bird Species	Status	Count	Number of surveys detected in	Reporting rate (%)
Dusky Woodswallow	VU	4	1	0.1
Glossy Black-Cockatoo	VU	7	4	0.41
Little Eagle	VU	1	1	0.1
Little Lorikeet	VU	51	4	0.41
Powerful Owl	VU	17	13	1.34

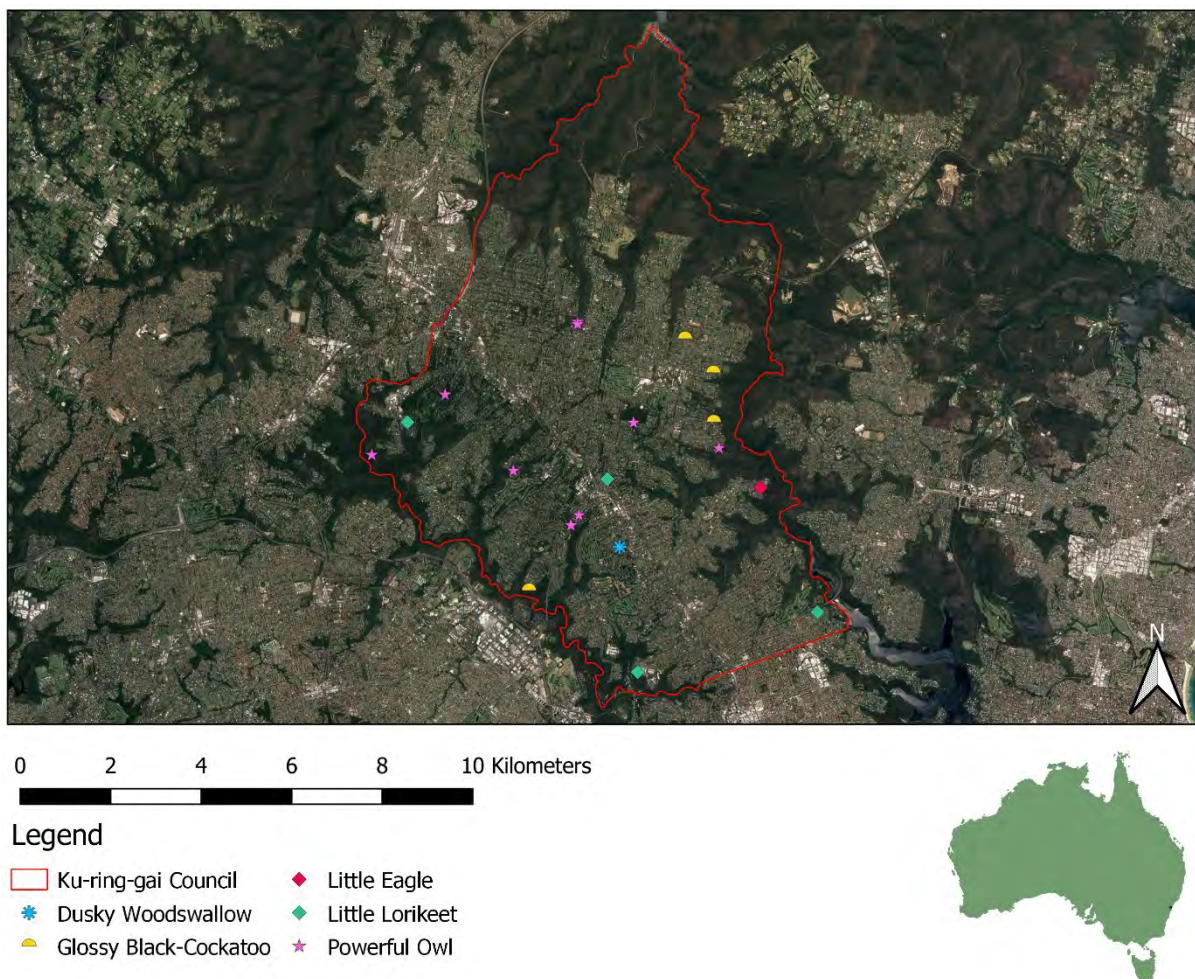


Figure 5: Distribution of the threatened bird species within the Ku-ring-gai Council boundaries during the 2021 Aussie Backyard Bird Count. Bird observations that were recorded in a single survey overlap due to having the same GPS co-ordinates.

One threatened raptor species was recorded within the Ku-ring-gai Council boundaries in 2021:

- Little Eagle (Vulnerable)

A number of Australian raptor species are threatened due to habitat destruction and fragmentation, loss of nesting hollows, declining prey availability, and the use of rodenticides.

One threatened woodland-associated bird species was recorded within the Ku-ring-gai Council boundaries in 2021:

- Dusky Woodswallow (Vulnerable)

Since European settlement, over 80% of Australia's temperate woodlands have been cleared, resulting in many woodland-dependent bird species experiencing population declines and being reclassified as threatened (BirdLife Australia, 2015). The temperate south-eastern regions of Australia have experienced the largest number of woodland species declines. In response to the documented declines in woodland bird species, BirdLife Australia has implemented the Woodland Birds for Biodiversity Project to enhance the conservation of declining and threatened woodland bird species. This project builds on the recovery efforts of the Critically Endangered Regent Honeyeater which has been the focus of long-term intensive recovery initiatives by BirdLife Australia and, due to its high profile, acts as a flagship species for the conservation of other threatened woodland birds. The Woodland Birds for Biodiversity Project aims to:

- Monitor habitat restoration activities and bird populations to determine priority habitat sites and population trends.
- Identify and monitor climate change impacts on woodland habitat and woodland-dependent bird species.
- Improve the management and protection of woodland habitat on private and public land.
- Restoration and revegetation of areas to improve the amount of available habitat and connectivity of this habitat.
- Community education and involvement in survey efforts and monitoring.

Two threatened parrot species were recorded within the Ku-ring-gai Council boundaries in 2021:

- Glossy Black-Cockatoo (Vulnerable)
- Little Lorikeet (Vulnerable)

Numerous native parrot species are threatened in Australia, with each species facing its own set of conservation challenges. However, many parrot species are experiencing population declines due to the lack of reliable food access and suitable nesting sites, particularly mature tree hollows, which are essential for successful breeding. Habitat loss and modification is decreasing the number of suitably sized tree hollows available for threatened parrot species to nest in, and the hollows that do remain are subject to fierce competition. These hollows are often won and subsequently used by more aggressive bird species (e.g., Crimson Rosellas, Galahs, Rainbow Lorikeets and Common Starlings), European honeybees, and marsupials (BirdLife Australia, 2015).

One threatened owl species was recorded within the Ku-ring-gai Council boundaries in 2021:

- Powerful Owl (Vulnerable)

Many owl species are threatened due to the use of rodenticides, habitat destruction and fragmentation, and loss of nesting hollows in old growth trees.

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

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



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

Email:

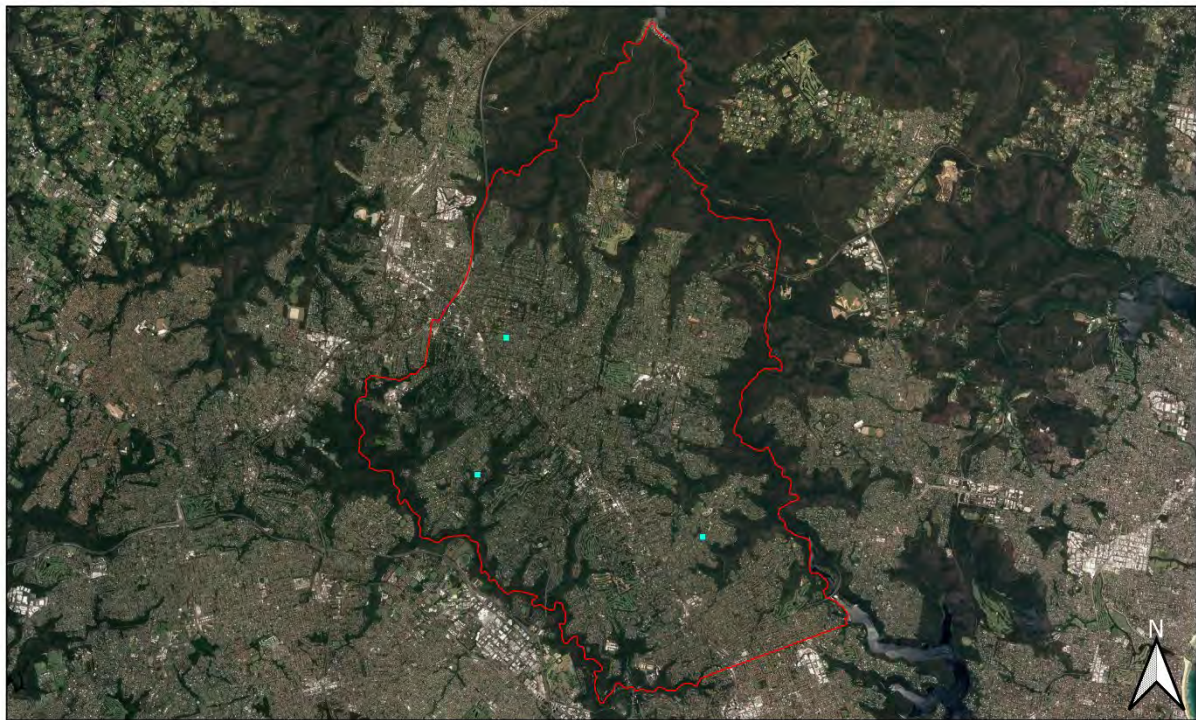
Alexandra Johnson,
Birds in Schools Project Officer
alexandra.johnson@birdlife.org.au

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

Appendix One – Introduced Species Maps



The individual distribution maps for each introduced species recorded within council boundaries during the 2021 Aussie Backyard Bird Count, in alphabetical order, are presented in Appendix One. No figure captions have been provided, as the format is identical to that of Figure 4.



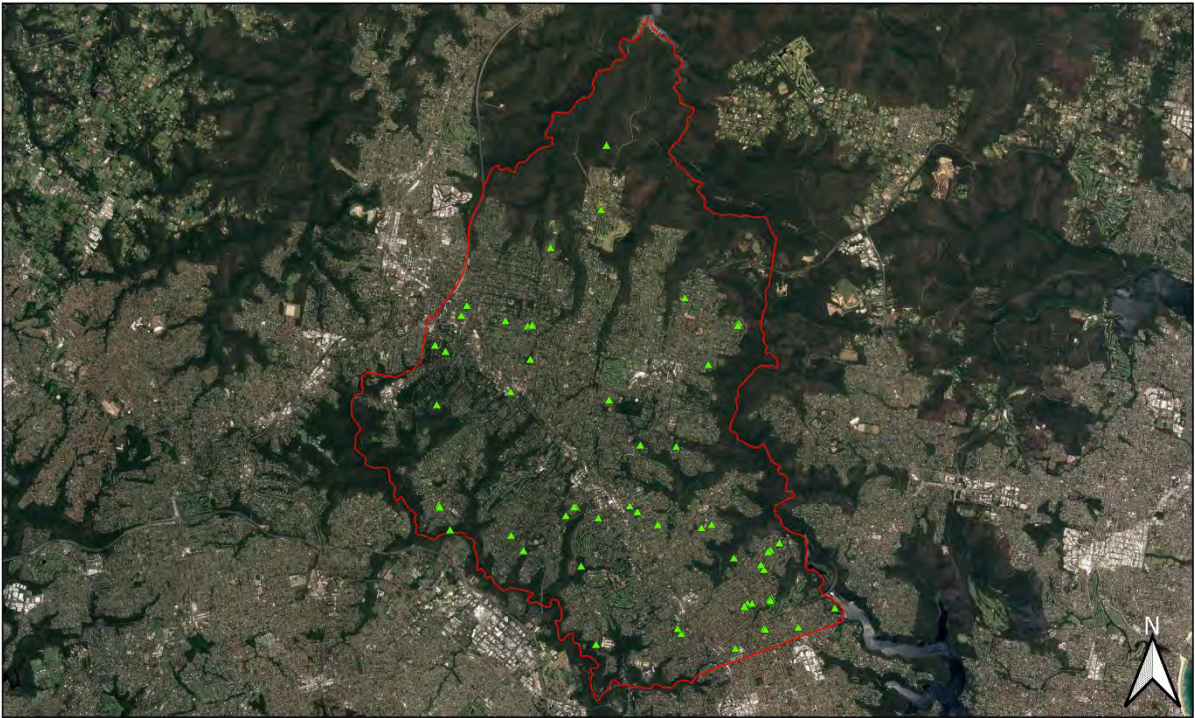
0 2 4 6 8 10 Kilometers



Legend



-  Ku-ring-gai Council
-  Common Blackbird



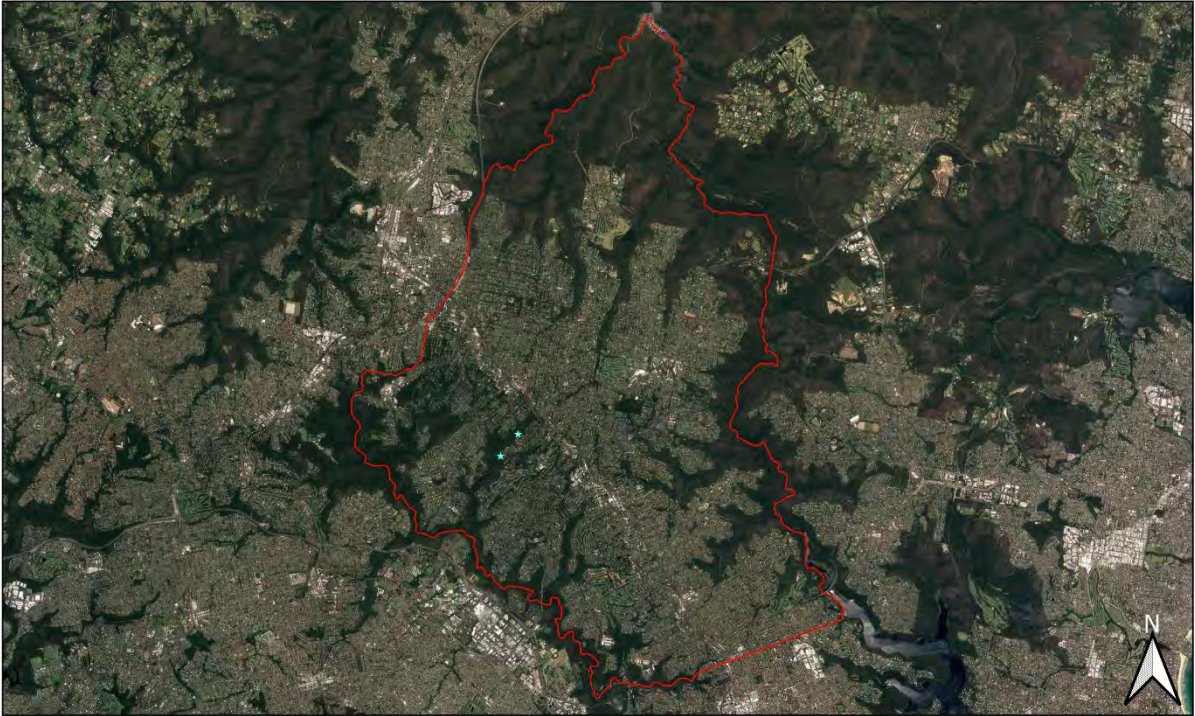


0 2 4 6 8 10 Kilometers

Legend

-  Ku-ring-gai Council
-  Common Myna







0 2 4 6 8 10 Kilometers



Legend

-  Ku-ring-gai Council
-  Common Starling







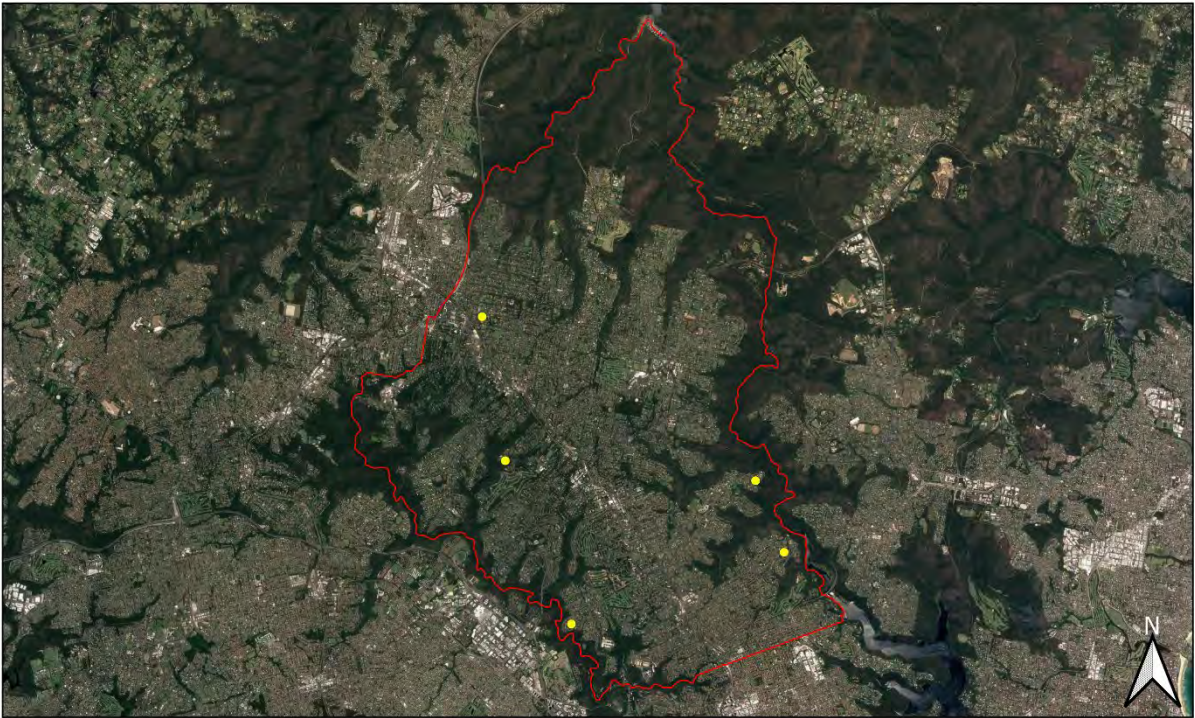
0 2 4 6 8 10 Kilometers



Legend



-  Ku-ring-gai Council
-  Domestic Duck



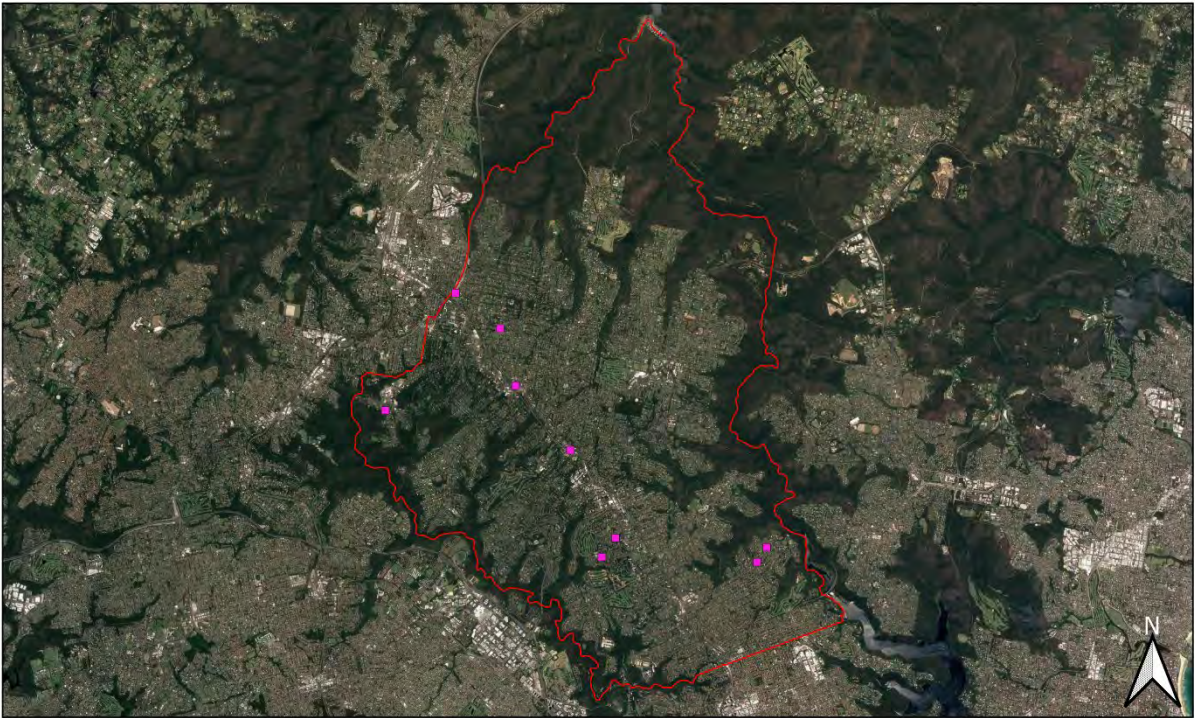


0 2 4 6 8 10 Kilometers

Legend

-  Ku-ring-gai Council
-  House Sparrow







0 2 4 6 8 10 Kilometers



Legend

-  Ku-ring-gai Council
-  Rock Dove







0 2 4 6 8 10 Kilometers



Legend

-  Ku-ring-gai Council
-  Spotted Dove

