



WildWatch Australia RESULTS SUMMARY

June 2004

www.abc.net.au/wildwatch

This report is a summary – more information including regional breakdowns can be found on the website: www.abc.net.au/wildwatch under these headings:

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- what people are doing about: – cane toads – indian mynas

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1. About the survey

An Amazing Response

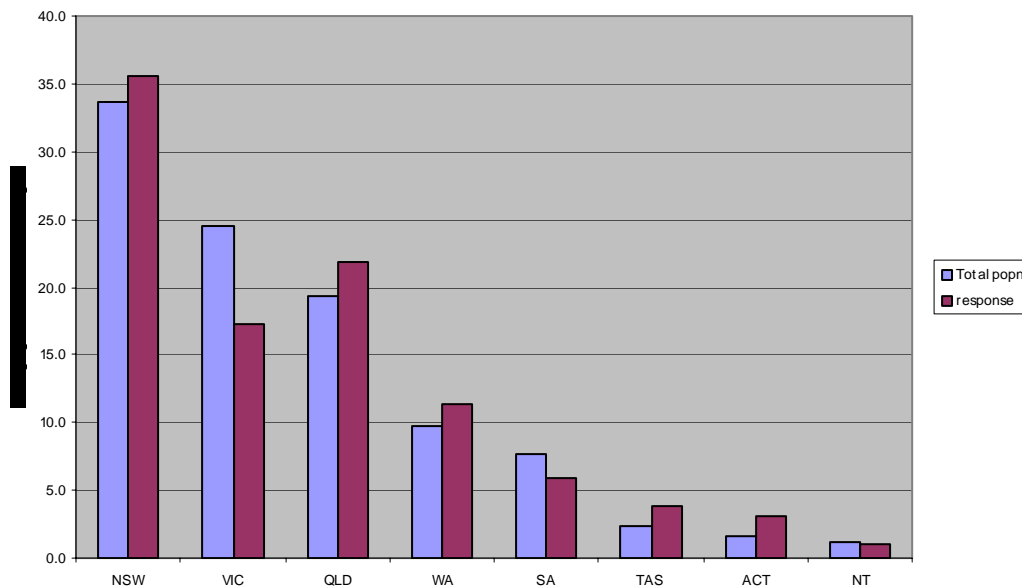
The first stage of WildWatch Australia has generated an enthusiasm and interest in the wildlife living close to us from all over the continent, as far as Magnetic Island and the Gibson Desert to Sydney CBD. It has had a phenomenal response – 27,364 surveys completed, and 347,700 page accesses to the online site.

Who responded?

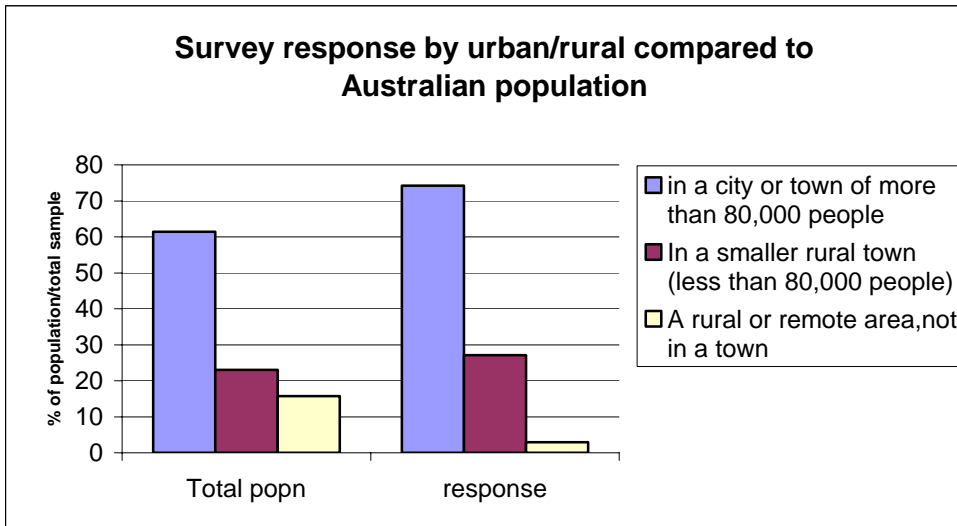
We've compared the response to WildWatch with the total Australian population, and also the ABC audience just to see what mix of people are represented.

There was an excellent spread from across the continent – the number from each state was in line with the population figures. (Apart from Victoria which gave way to Queensland in the no. 2 spot!)

Survey response by state compared to Australian population 2001



Also a good mix of urban and rural [see *graph*], a spread of age groups [see *graph*]. and a balance of males/females.



What happens now?

The raw data will be available to councils, universities and other wildlife management organisations for further analysis, and will lead to further research. We are also looking to publish the results in a journal in conjunction with a university.

2. The Results

Interesting Facts

- Cat owners who put bells on their pet have more frog, reptile and bird groups than those who don't.
- Just over 6 out of 10 people have trees over three metres in their garden
- Gardens with native bush along the street have much higher diversity of frogs, reptiles, birds and mammals
- 61% of people have birdbaths in their gardens. 29% hand feed or lay out food for wildlife.
- 40% of people feed wildlife more than once a week. 41% never feed wildlife.
- Lorikeets, rosellas and other parrots, as well as magpies are the mostly common fed wildlife, with 51% of respondents reporting these animals are fed.
- 26% of people own dogs, 15% own cats;
- 50% of dog owners keep their dogs inside at night. 71% of cat owners keep their cats inside at night.
- 63% of people consider the main threats to native wildlife in their garden to be domestic pets
- the North Wet/dry Tropics appears to have the most natural gardens of all regions – with most local native plants – and also has the most mammals reported
- the Subtropical slopes/plains region appears to make the most effort attracting wildlife – with more nestboxes, feeding and birdbaths than anywhere else.
- the Arid Interior had the lowest diversity of mammals reported, yet the highest rate of cat control

Ten most common species

flies/mosquitoes	26570
butterflies/moths	26432
spiders/scorpions	26374
ants/termites	26254
beetles/bugs/weevils	25505
lorikeets, rosellas and other parrots	24674
cicadas/grasshoppers/crickets	24455
magpies	24243
earthworms/flatworms	23710
native wasps/bees	22544

Ten least common species

Tasmanian devils	227
brush-tailed phascogales	349
platypuses	553
quolls	603
dingoes	755
wombats	1187
small marsupials (e.g. dunnarts, antechinus)	1579
koalas	1734
gliders	1926
native turtles/tortoises	2088

What's In/What's Out

- least liked animal group of all was **flies/mosquitoes** (clear winner in these stakes with 89% of people disliking them!)
- favourite animals of all were **small insect-eating birds** (perhaps because they eat the least favourite animals!), but **lorikeets, rosellas** & other **parrots, honeyeaters** and **frogs** were close behind

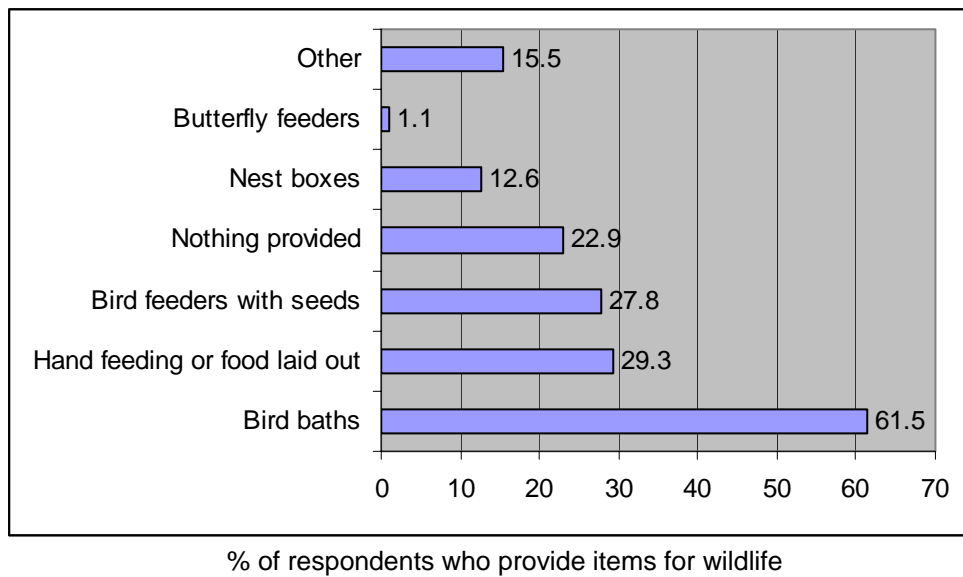
% of people who liked; total no. of people			
LEAST LIKED:		MOST LIKED:	
invertebrates:		invertebrates:	
1. flies/mosquitoes	89.0%; 22,306	1. butterflies/moths	96.7%; 23,871
2. ants/termites	63.5%; 15,392	2. earthworms/flatworms	97.2%; 21,877
3. snails	69.1%; 13,534	3. dragonflies	97.3%; 18,124
frogs/reptiles		frogs/reptiles	
1. snakes	49.6%; 5,276	1. skinks	98.1%; 20,862
2. goannas (monitors)	11.3%; 645	2. frogs	98.3%; 16,057
birds		birds	
1. crows, ravens	33.0%; 6,268	1. lorikeets, rosellas & other parrots	98.6%; 23,521
2. currawongs	22.0%; 3,169	2. honeyeaters	98.7%; 21,735
3. butcherbirds	11.2%; 1,764	3. small insect-eating birds	98.9%; 18,223
mammals		mammals	
1. native mice and rats	40.6%; 3,822	1. echidnas	97.6%; 5,362
2. flying foxes or fruit bats	19.7%; 2,250	2. gliders	95.6%; 3,869
3. dingoes	23.5%; 667	3. koalas	97.3%; 3,617
		[possums	90.2%; 13,800; 153]

3. What it all means

The most important findings (from Darryl Jones)

- The hand that feeds

The WildWatch survey confirms that Australians everywhere are actively engaged in attracting wildlife to their backyards using bird baths, nest boxes, seed feeders and the provision of feeding tables. Bird tables were by far the most common item used; more than half of all respondents reported having a bird bath, and more than 10% mentioned nest boxes.

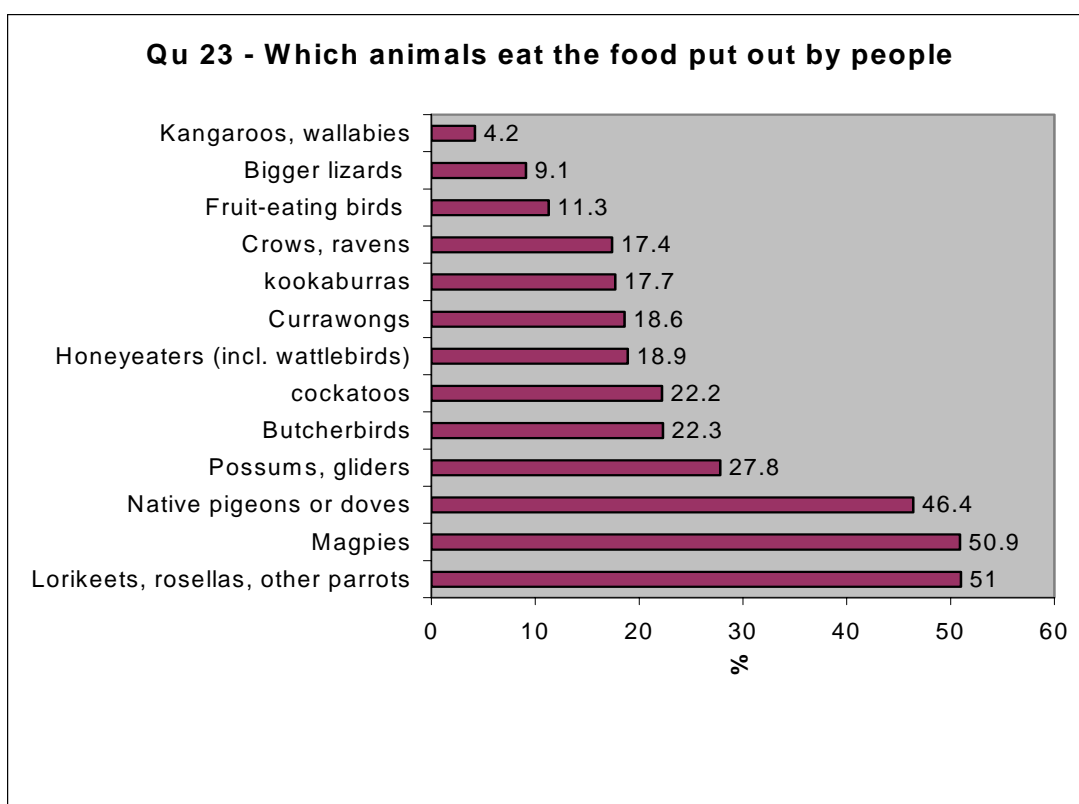


Perhaps the most remarkable finding was the extent to which respondents from every state reporting hand feeding or placing food out for visiting animals. More than 25% of respondents from each state fed wildlife at their homes, with people from Victoria, South Australia and ACT having the highest participation rates. People in Tasmania and the Northern Territory had the lowest feeding rates but even so, more than 20% of respondents were involved.

Nonetheless, many people did not feed wildlife! Overall, about 40% of respondents stated that they never fed. Those never feeding varied from about a quarter of ACT respondents to over half of those from Tasmania and NT.

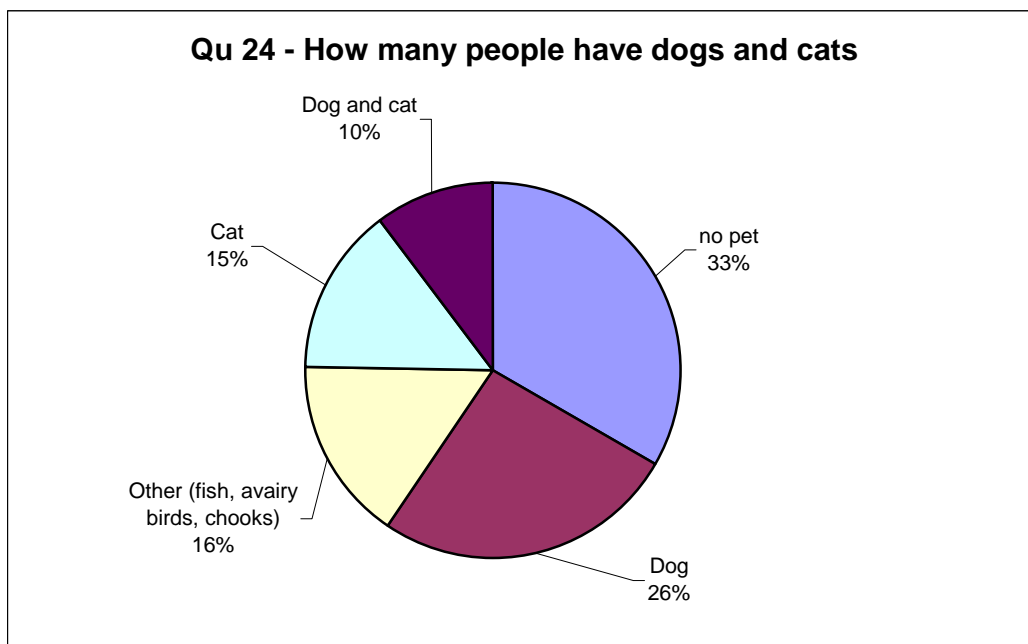
Those people who did feed wildlife reported a wide variety of animal groups but over half of all respondents listed either magpies and 'parrots' visiting their gardens. Previous studies have also found magpies and parrots (especially rainbow lorikeets, eastern rosellas and crimson rosellas) to be both common visitors to feeding stations and the species mentioned as favourites.

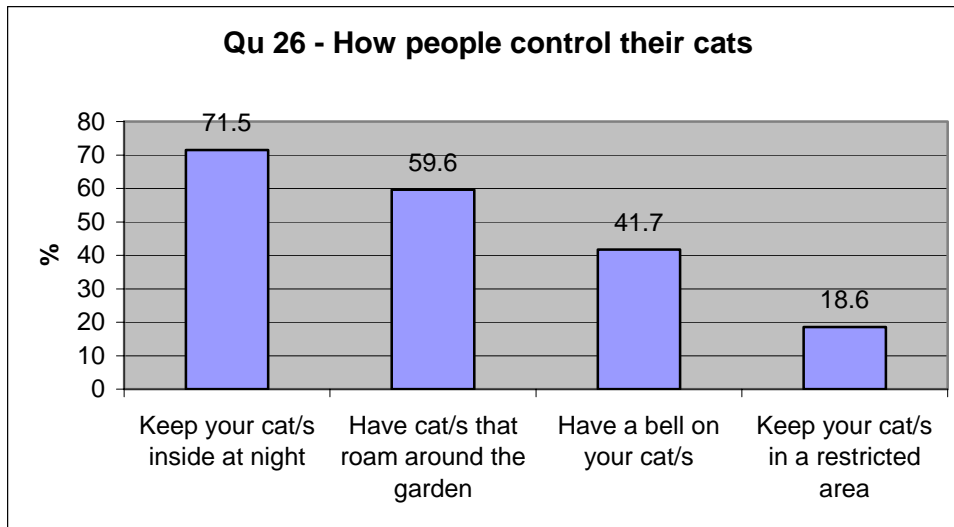
In contrast, almost 20% of respondents reported visits by 'crows and ravens' and currawongs, species named elsewhere in the surveys as the birds least liked by respondents.



- **Cats and Dogs**

Australians have one of the highest levels of pet ownership in the world. Among the many WildWatch respondents, only a third did not own a dog, cat (or both) or some other pet. [CQ24]. These folks were also adamant that domestic pets posed the greatest threat to native wildlife in gardens (well ahead of roads and fences, or the lack of suitable habitat) [CQ30]. Such fears are well founded although remarkably little research has been done on these issues in Australia. It is known, however, that dogs are responsible for a large number of possum deaths in backyards with ringtails being especially vulnerable. Similarly, the presence of cats is known to virtually guarantee that most smaller birds will not nest in a garden.





For cats, by far the majority (71%) of respondents kept their pet inside at night (compared to only about half of dog owners) and about 40% placed a bell on their cat's collar. About one pet owner in five restricted their animal's movements to particular area, ostensibly as an attempt to minimise contact with wildlife.

So, do these ideas work? Are pet owners in general likely to see less wildlife than not pet owners?

First, pet owners were more likely not to feed wildlife [G-task 29], possibly as a means of minimising potential impact by their pet.

Second, rather unexpectedly, pet owners reported a significantly higher number of all animal groups, including birds and mammals, than did non-pet owners. [G-Fig 31-33]. However, this certainly does not mean that having pets means more wildlife in your garden – the opposite is more likely. Perhaps more likely, people with pets are more likely to have the sort of yard that wildlife might visit, may be more likely to be outside to notice the wildlife, or may simply be the sorts of people more likely to notice wildlife in the first place.

And finally, WildWatch demonstrated clearly that managing your pets does work: respondents who restricted the movements of their dogs and cats saw significantly more birds and mammals than any other style of pet management. [G-Fig 34-37] Interestingly, the well-known technique of putting a bell on cats was reported to work very well for frogs and reptiles and birds but not for mammals [G-Fig 43-45].

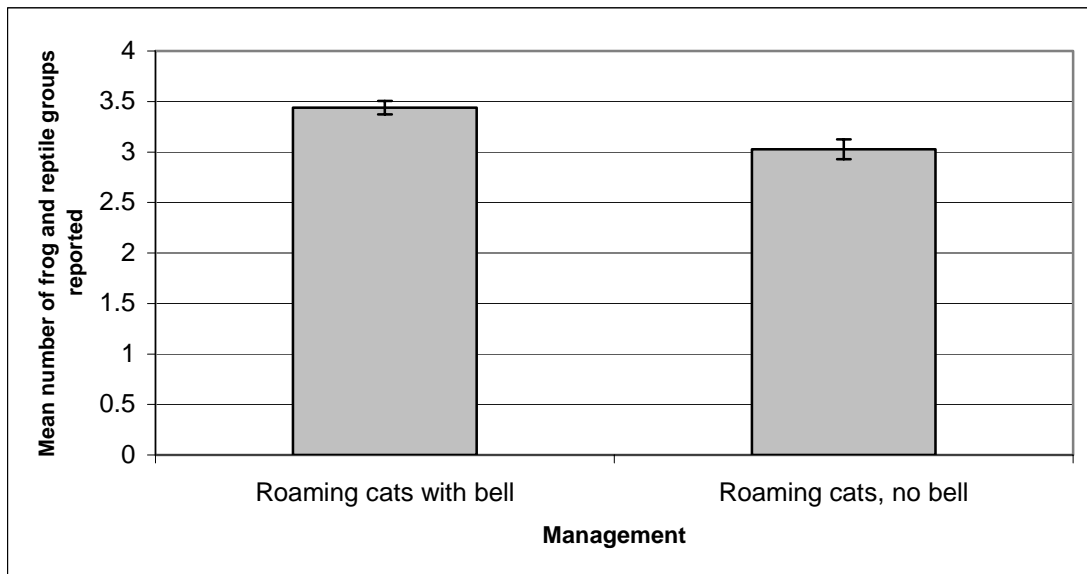


Figure 43 – A graph of the mean number of frog and reptile groups reported by cat owners that restrict the movement of their pets in some way and those that do not.

- **City and country**

WildWatch revealed an expected but hitherto unproven trend of seeing greater biodiversity in gardens as we move from the inner city, through the suburbs of large cities, to the fringes of small town and finally to remote or rural locations. Thus a very clear result: people living away from towns were likely to see more of everything. [G-Fig 5-8].

Nonetheless, even those living in inner city or heavily suburban areas did see wildlife. For example, while people living away from cities reported an average of about five frog and reptile, ten bird and 4.5 mammal groups, those living in the suburbs still saw an average of two frog/reptile, seven bird and 1.5 mammals. [G-Fig 5-8]

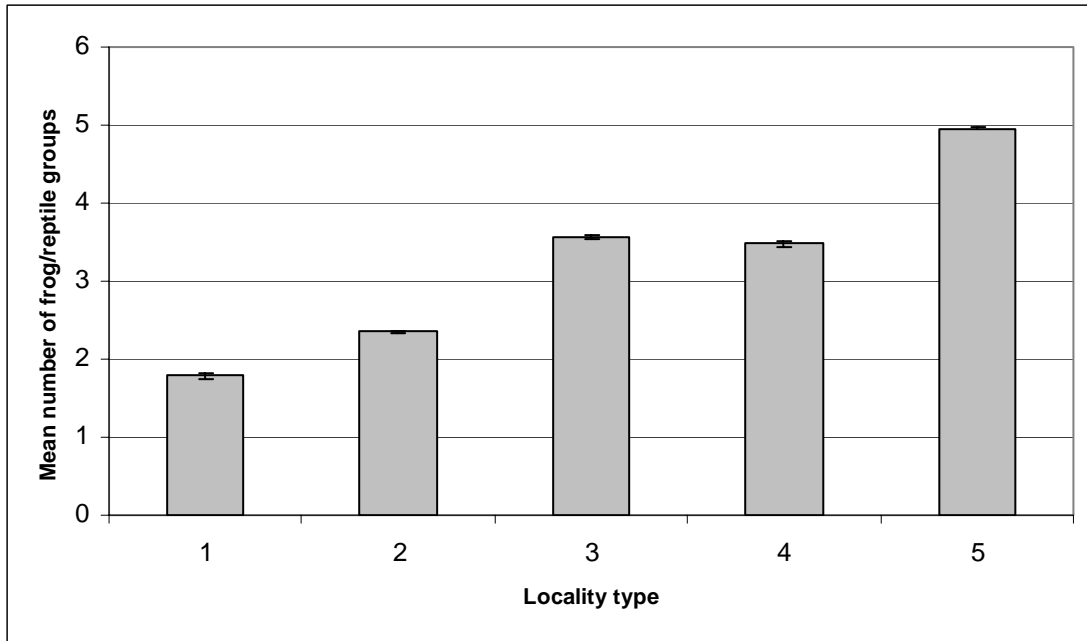


Figure 6 - A graph of the mean number of frog and reptile groups reported from each of the locality types.

Living near (within a two minute walk) of an area of bushland was also extremely important for predicting which gardens supported the most wildlife. All wildlife groups were much more commonly seen in gardens located close to bushland. Many studies have demonstrated that the remarkably high biodiversity enjoyed by people living even in Australia's largest cities is highly dependant on the presence of large reserves of intact bushland nearby [G-Fig 17-20]

- **Native plants matter!**

Question Five of the WildWatch survey asked people to nominate what type of vegetation their garden contained. The results of this question are among the most important of the many findings to be revealed: native plants matter, a lot!

For invertebrate, frog and reptile, bird and mammal groups, the presence of native species in the garden, the proportion of natives and – especially – whether the natives were mainly native to the local area –supported many more groups than gardens with more exotic plants. This is a very important – and statistically robust – result.

Similarly, trees are very important for all wildlife groups. Gardens containing tall trees supported many more frogs and reptiles, birds and mammal groups than gardens without. [G-Fig 14-16]

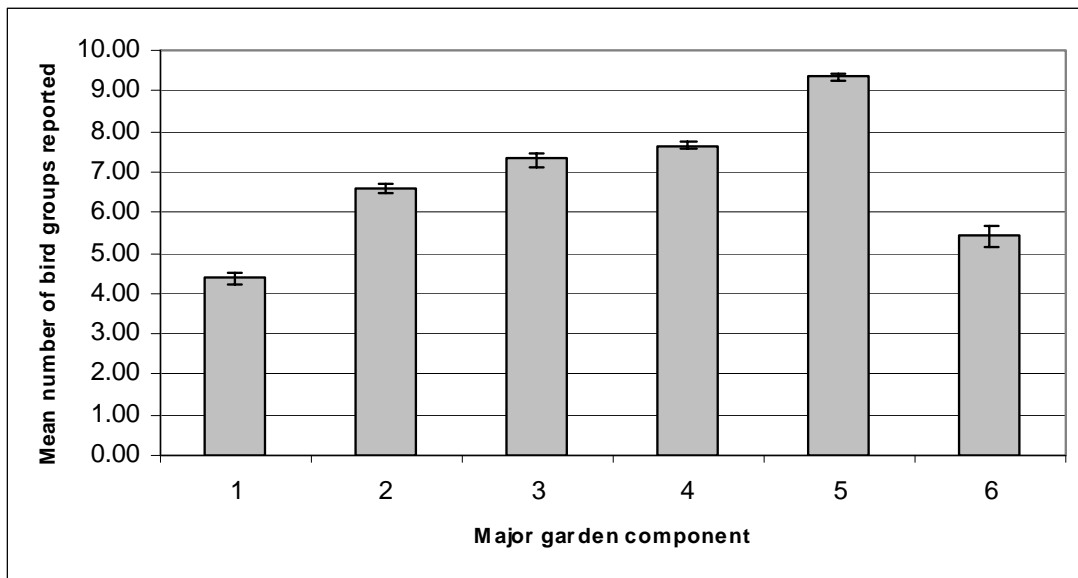


Figure 15 - A graph of the mean number of bird groups reported from each of the six garden types. 1 = no plants; 2 = not many plants; 3 = all non-Australian plants; 4 = All Australian plants; 5 = a mixture of Australian & non-Australian plants; 6 = all or most plants locally native

Dr Darryl Jones

**Senior Lecturer in ecology, Australian School of Environmental Studies
Griffith University**

WildWatch2

We'll be conducting another survey in September!

The next stage will continue to tap into the elements that have made WILDWATCH a success. The key ingredients are the audience participation and involvement generated by the across platform approach.

From the first survey we found people wanted more – more detail, more about ferals/pests and more about changes. So the September survey will feature three main parts – pests, changes and a detailed species section – each part will be optional and they will vary in difficulty level. The survey will also feature the seasonal element. We will bring to the fore the issues that have emerged from different people around Australia and delve deeper into them. The information gathered will be used by scientific organisations, as with the first survey.

In the TV programs and Local Radio slots we'll look at how some of these issues are being tackled - by experts and non-experts alike, and encourage participation in the survey.