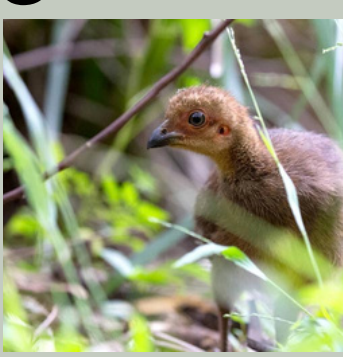


Living with Brush Turkeys



What do they look like?

- The brush turkey is easily recognisable by its black plumage, bare red head, yellow throat, and laterally flattened tail.
- It is the largest Australian member of the family Megapodidae (which means “large foot”), which also includes turkeys and quails.

Where are they found?

- They are found in NSW and Queensland, primarily in rainforests and eucalypt forests.
- It stays in one area year-round, breeding and foraging in forest leaf litter.
- During the Great Depression, their population declined due to hunting for meat and eggs.
- Now protected under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*, their numbers are recovering in areas where they have not been seen for many decades.

Fast facts

- Both male and female turkeys have precise heat sensors in their upper beaks, allowing them to regulate the temperature of their nests.
- Individual brush turkeys can migrate over large distances.
- Brush turkey chicks can fly much better than adults.
- Brush turkeys help reduce wildfire fuel by breaking up dry leaves and twigs, creating refuges for small animals during wildfires.

Breeding

- Breeding occurs from August to January and females are attracted to well-maintained mounds and lay eggs inside them.
- The heat from the decomposing vegetation incubates the eggs. The male brush turkey keeps watch while the eggs incubate.
- After approximately 50 days the chicks hatch and are immediately independent.
- The eggs and chicks are vulnerable to predators like goannas, foxes and domestic pets, leading to high losses.

Manage brush turkeys in your garden

STOP ATTRACTING THEM TO YOUR BACKYARD:

- Don't leave food out for other native species or household pets.
- Keep piles of spare mulch and leaves covered with tarpaulins or chicken wire.
- Cover the compost and keep your yard raked free of leaf litter.
- Invest in a Garden Sentinel (Motion Activated Sprinkler) that sprays water onto the birds each time they walk by.

HOW TO PROTECT YOUR PLANTS?

- Insert vertical sticks, like eucalyptus branches, into the ground around the plants to create barriers.
- Place large logs or small rocks next to or near the plants can also help.
- Cover the area with large, heavily branched sticks and tree lopping.
- Use tree guards to protect small/newly-established plants and spread river gravel around the base to protect the roots.
- Place matting to prevent birds from scratching and secure it with stakes or logs either on top of or beneath the mulch.
- Coincide the planting with the non-breeding season (February to May, June or July), especially if there is a mound nearby.

CHOICE OF PLANTS:

- Plant your garden with native flowering groundcovers like prostrate grevillea, clumping lomandra, and dianella grasses, as brush turkeys are unlikely to rake them.

HOW TO DETER MOUND BUILDING OR MOVE A DORMANT MOUND:

- Watch for males building mounds in Sydney during July and August by removing leaf litter. You may need to clear the mounds several times before they stop.
- Cover a mound that doesn't yet contain eggs with a heavy-duty tarp, black plastic, or shade cloth to deter the male.
- Prune overhanging branches above the mound, as male turkeys prefer a shady spot for their nests to better control the mound's temperature.
- Act early when the male starts building the mound, as once it's built, trying to deter a brush turkey will be futile.
- You can safely remove the mound after the 49-day incubation period, once all the chicks have hatched, or if the male abandons it earlier.

THE NO-NO'S AND LEGAL SIDE OF THINGS:

All methods to deter brush turkeys must be harmless, as they are protected by law in NSW. Harming them can result in fines up to \$22,000 under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*. The following can legally be considered harmful to brush turkeys:

- Killing and injury them (such as by using traps, poison or weapons);
- Catching them, with or without translocation to another area;
- Destroying mounds that contain eggs;
- Fence in mounds that contain eggs, as these eggs are destined to die if the male can no longer tend the mound; and
- Removing and destroying eggs from mound.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

- Report injured brush turkeys to Sydney Wildlife Rescue by calling 1300094737.
- Brush turkey chicks are independent; report only if injured or unwell.
- Do not feed brush turkeys; unnatural food can make them sick.
- Provide a bowl of drinking water on the ground during droughts and heat waves.
- Record brush turkey sightings in the Big City Birds app to aid research on their urban adaptation and territory.

MORE INFORMATION:

Learn to embrace brush turkeys.

Find out more:

- Birds in backyards: www.birdsinbackyards.net
- NSW Environment and Heritage: <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/>
- Scan the QR code to learn more about them or buy the book “Amazing Annoying Birds -Living with Australian Brush-Turkeys” by Dr. Ann Goth.



Big City Birds app

