

Habitats –homes for wildlife

fact file

Habitat is a word used to describe the home of animals. A Habitat provides an animal with access to food and shelter as well as the ability to breed. Habitats can range from a giant old-growth Mountain Ash forest (home to the Leadbeater's possum) to a small crevice under a rock (perfect for a skink)! There are even some amazing water habitats such as wetlands, sea kelp forests and rockpools.

Protecting and caring for native habitats is an important part of ensuring the survival of our native species.

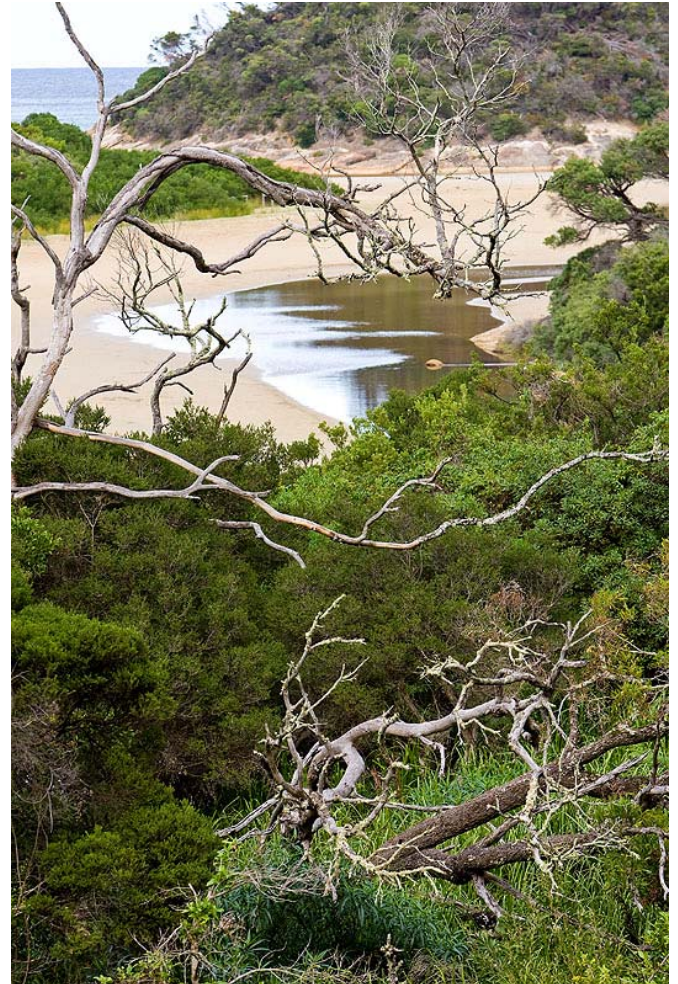
The arrival of Europeans in Australia has had a severe impact on wildlife habitats

Since Europeans arrived in Australia over one hundred plant and animal species have become extinct. These species have been lost for many reasons including over-hunting and competition and predation from introduced species. However the main reason for extinction is habitat clearing.

Native habitats have and are continuing to be cleared or damaged to make way for human projects including mining, timber harvesting, agriculture, and housing developments.

Introduced species including foxes and feral cats as well as diseases such as the plant root rot fungus *Phytophthora cinnamomi* are making it even harder for native plants and animals to survive.

The Eastern Barred Bandicoot is endangered largely due to clearing of its grassland habitat. Almost all of Victoria's native grasslands and grassy woodlands have been lost to agricultural and residential development. These grasslands are important as they provide the Bandicoot with dense and low shrub cover for nesting, areas to hide from predators and conditions for breeding.



The Junior Ranger Way

Know before you go, respect parks and wildlife and leave no trace along your way, that's the Junior Ranger Way!

The Helmeted Honey-eater is another species listed as critically endangered due to habitat clearing. The Helmeted Honey-eater is now only found in a very small area of remnant streamside swamp forest habitat east of Melbourne. Fortunately this area of habitat is now protected as a part of the Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve and captive breeding of the bird is proving successful.

Populations of some threatened species can be saved through captive breeding and release programs. However animals that do not respond well to captive breeding will only survive if their habitat is protected.

Protection of habitat is crucial to wildlife survival

Victoria's National Parks and reserves protect a wide range of habitats ranging from rainforest to woodlands and coastal heathlands. With increasing land clearing, the habitats within these protected areas are becoming more and more important for the survival of native species.

Many national parks and reserves are actually declared with the primarily goal of protecting the habitats of plant and animal species. For example the Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve 50km east of Melbourne has been established to protect the habitat of species such as the Leadbeaters Possum and the Helmeted Honey-eater.

People and wildlife living in harmony

It's possible for us to live alongside wildlife, we just need to protect and provide suitable habitats. You may already be lucky enough to have birds nesting around your house, bats visiting your garden or possums living in nearby trees.

Tall trees with short grass and a neatly mown creek may look lovely, but offer poor habitat for native species. Visit a national park and discover that natural habitat doesn't look neat and tidy. Instead you'll find a diversity of plants, dead trees, fallen leaves, branches and logs.

To help create a wildlife habitat in your garden and encourage native animals, plant as many native plants as you can. These provide nectar, seeds, and shelter for native birds and feed for other animals such as caterpillars and lizards.

Building nesting boxes for micro bats, possums and parrots can also attract animals. Install a frog pond or a bird bath. Create ground cover for lizards using native grasses, logs and stones.

Your local council should be able to provide information on the local plant and animal species in your area.

Habitat corridors – nature's highways

Some animals are always on the move, searching for food and finding new homes. If an animal lives in an isolated patch of habitat it becomes susceptible to events such as bushfire, disease, human disturbance and reduced genetic diversity. Creating links or corridors between natural habitat areas allows animals to travel and helps the survival of wildlife populations and native plants.

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Long and wide native habitat corridors are best for providing food, shelter, nesting sites and safe travel. If this is not possible short narrow corridors or habitat patches (which act like stepping stones) can also be useful.

In urban areas, waterways are ideal places for planting wildlife corridors. Rail lines and roadsides are also useful. Habitat patches can also be created in schools, parks and backyards.

What you do in your habitat will have a direct effect on natural habitats

We can all help protect native habitats by being aware and thinking about how we live.

A great way to help improve wildlife habitats and learn more about wildlife in your neighbourhood is to join a Landcare or Friends group. These groups work with park rangers and local councils to help to maintain and grow native vegetation in parks, schools and other reserves.

Visiting parks is a great way to explore and learn about native animal habitats. It's interesting to see how animals live in the wild and the types of habitats that different animals live in.

For more information:

www.parkweb.vic.gov.au

www.dse.vic.gov.au