 **Landcare Broken Hill Inc**

***Greening the Hill Mk.2***

ABC Radio interview No.27 – 29 October 2019

**WILDLIFE HABITAT PROTECTION & CREATION**

Today I’m going to be talking about creating and/or protecting the habitat in our gardens or on our properties for wildlife – such as small birds.

Why do we care?

Maintaining biodiversity is important as it preserves the genetic stock of life. We have birds and animals which add a rich tapestry of interest to our lives.

Birds and animals perform beneficial functions – for instance, little birds continually eat insects. If they didn’t eat those insects, those insects would most probably eat plants that we want to keep – like flowers or vegetables. Some insects sting and bite us humans, so if birds are eating those insects, they are protecting us at the same time.

Having other living creatures in our lives does enrich our lives, it adds interest, excitement, beauty, distractions, etc.

People’s mental health improves when other creatures are about. I once read a rather disturbing article, indeed a sad report, about inner city parks in Tokyo where the hubbub of city life was such, with the millions of people and the tens of thousands of vehicles and the resultant pollution, that the birdlife had disappeared. People missed the birds, people were upset and stressed not to hear bird calls and see them fliting around from shrub to shrub, tree to tree. So the authorities had to introduce electronic bird call, triggered by motion detectors. So as people walked about an artificial bird call, an electronic bird call, was triggered. They had to take this step to bring back that sense of happiness or that sense of being with and in nature that in part is created by bird song.

**Retaining or creating habitat for small animals and birds.**

So when we design our gardens or manage them, we should think about providing places for the little ‘critters’ to share our patch. That essentially means building or leaving places for birds to nest or hide away.

Small birds, especially colourful song birds, have lots of predators. We all know that cats love a tasty bird, as do birds of prey, such as hawks and falcons, eagles and owls. So every garden should have an area set aside for some spiky plants. Spiky plants provide places where birds can hide away and nest out of harms way.

In our hot climate we should always think of putting water out for birds and even lizards. So a bird bath up on a pedestal, nestled into a prickly plant is ideal. But lizards, such as the sleepy or shingleback, are just as in need of water as any other. So a shaded bowl of water should be placed on the ground in everyone’s garden.

Providing true hiding places for a range of creatures is also important. Some will go into hollows in trees, to rest, breed and nest. Hollow trees are really important in the bush as they are the preferred habitat for many creatures. In many parts of Australia there is a prohibition against the removal of hollow nesting trees, even if the tree has died.

In a private garden, if one cares about the wildlife, there are very good reasons to tie small hollow logs up in the fork of trees so that birds or small animals can make them their homes. Likewise, with lizards, providing a home in a quiet spot in the garden is a really good idea, especially as such logs provide shelter from the elements, which can become extreme. Some people create rock gardens for ground creatures, like lizards, to live in.

If you have a dog or a cat, it is especially important to think of creating safe havens so that small creatures can get away and be safe from attack. It is in the genetics of cats and dogs to attack smaller creatures, so if we care about the wildlife around us, we should take steps to protect them.

So with garden design, it will often be wise to plan for a corner that is off limit to your pets and even yourself. You might choose a particularly prickly plant that grows into a big protective haven for creatures that would otherwise be under threat. You only have to walk through the bush and observe the sort of plants chosen to nest in by small birds, to understand how important it is to create such habitat if you are in more built up urban areas.

By looking after the biodiversity of our natural world, science is telling us that the natural balance which is thereby created is really beneficial for us all. Farmers who establish shelter belts of boundary plants or woodlots report how an increased presence of birds around keeps other creatures in balance, such as pest insects. It is where we get things out of kilter and the natural balances are gone, that we find people resort to insecticides. With birds gone, insects increase and with more insects, the greater the impact on the plants that insects feed on. Once this cycle of life becomes out of balance, the greater the reliance on harmful artificial substances.

So the bottom line is, given a thought to the other creatures that share our world. More often than not there will be a good reason to protect them or at least give them space to live in harmony with nature.

**The next public meeting of Landcare Broken Hill will be its ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

**at the Centre for Community, 200 Beryl Street, Thursday 31 October 7.00pm**

**when we will present the 6 month Report on *GREENING THE HILL MK2***

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