

POSITION STATEMENT

Feeding of wild birds

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Whilst bird feeders allow us the enjoyment of viewing birds at close range in our gardens, the supplementary feeding of birds should always be done responsibly and be limited to urban areas.

BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA POSITION STATEMENT

The use of bird feeders should provide birds with supplementary feeding only. As nature-lovers, we need to be mindful that the misuse of feeders may negatively affect birds. Long term supplementary feeding can influence bird populations and distributions. There is evidence to suggest that supplementary feeding may at times influence bird behaviour, health and ecology and may increase predation risk and the transmission of disease. Therefore, the careful selection and responsible use of bird feeders and bird baths are recommended.

BirdLife South Africa promotes bird feeding through the planting of locally indigenous plants that provides birds with natural food sources. Visit your local indigenous nursery for advice, or consult any of a number of books that have that have been written on the subject.

When using bird feeders and bird baths, BirdLife South Africa encourages the following guidelines:

- Place feeders at least a meter off the ground to ensure that accumulation of food on the feeder is minimised and attack by ground predators, such as domestic cats, is minimised;
- Place bird feeders in different parts of the garden, if more than one feeder is being provided;
- Birds should be provided with natural and healthy sources of food such as seeds, freshly chopped fruit and vegetables, suet, meal worms and bone meal. The feeding of milk and bread should be avoided (only some bird species can digest bread whereas dairy products lead to diarrhoea due in birds due to lactose intolerance).
- Minimize the spread of disease by disinfecting feeders and bird baths every day using F10 veterinary disinfectant soap (an environmentally-friendly soap available at any pet shop) or hot water and vinegar. Remove algal

growth on feeders and bird baths with a scrubbing brush;

- Ensure that any waste underneath the feeder is removed regularly;
- Discard any food that is damp, contains fungus or has a bad odour as soon as possible;
- BirdLife South Africa is opposed to the use of pesticides or chemical fertilizers in gardens which could be hazardous to birds and insects (which provide a natural food source to many birds);
- Supplementing birds with food needs to be done judiciously to avoid the birds becoming dependent on this food supply;
- When supplementing, be sure that the food is suitable and healthy, e.g.: nectar feeders need only have a 10-20% sucrose (table sugar) solution (most bird-pollinated plants in South Africa have a 10-20% solution of either sucrose or glucose and fructose, or a mix of the three);
- We strongly discourage the use of artificial sugar products and artificial colourants, especially xylitol which cannot be digested by birds and has been linked to sudden death of nectar-feeding birds;
- We discourage the use of honey, which is a complex sugar birds do not naturally eat, or additives like Bovril, Marmite, or any other protein supplements.

BirdLife South Africa is opposed to the feeding (luring) of wild birds for the purpose of game bird hunting.

BirdLife South Africa disapproves of the feeding of wild birds in their natural habitat, i.e. outside urban and suburban areas. However, BirdLife South Africa is not opposed to the feeding of wild birds in times of extreme drought or after major fires to support bird dispersal and to ensure the survival of natural populations.