

The drought, water restrictions and our wildlife

By Robin K Villiers-Brown

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All wildlife needs water, but with the current drought and present water restrictions the wildlife is also affected. The seed-eaters, for example, need to drink water approximately every 2 hours, and many birds need water to bathe in. For some it helps act as a cooling system for their bodies, and some also use water to soften their food.

So...our present water habits (including water saving restrictions if you are in a town that has water restrictions) **have an impact upon the wildlife, and ultimately on our long-term biodiversity.** Examples of present water restriction practices that are impacting upon the wildlife include:

1. There are less open water sources such as ponds or fountains. Previously these had an inadvertent role as a water source for many birds and other wildlife, and in fact water is essential for their daily needs - but without these ponds, where do the birds and wildlife get their water?
2. Prior to this many species of birds and other wildlife would drink from or bathe under sprinklers. They cannot, and indeed would be too "wild" to bathe under a hand-held hose (and should not be encouraged to do this). So, again, *if sprinklers are not used and some other watering system is used, how does the wildlife get water?*
3. Even if a sprinkler is used, if the watering occurs after dark as suggested in some water restriction systems, the diurnal wildlife will miss out on the water. So again - how do they drink? Will they be able to get any water? (I.e. if you are using a sprinkler the most environmentally friendly system to cater for the full spectrum of wildlife would be to alternate the sprinklers so that there is one at night and the next time it is on in the morning. Or if you have only one time have it on in the morning after dawn - and have containers of water for the nocturnal wildlife. This caters for a greater variety of wildlife. For example, I used my sprinkler at 9am in winter and had a small pond and 2 pot plant saucers with water. Most diurnal wildlife, such as our birds, don't wake up until dawn and they also need breakfast as well, so I use my sprinkler at 9am and can watch the birds frolicking under the sprinkler and washing themselves.) However, ultimately, the best is to provide a small pond or at least a bird bath.

Therefore, we should be considering the impact of our present systems on our wildlife, and on our long-term biodiversity.

BUT – not saving water has a greater impact upon the environment - so what can we do? Below are some ways you can easily help the wildlife while saving water.

Some easy ways you can also help the wildlife while saving water

1. One easy way is to provide water for the smaller wildlife, such as lizards, some smaller birds and frogs, by making a small depression under a shrub and placing a large pot plant saucer full of water there. Place sticks and stones to make a small sloping ramp up both the outside and the inside of the saucer, so the wildlife can get to the water and out of it without drowning. As the hollow is in the shade it does not have to be refilled much. Tip this out (onto a more thirsty plant) regularly to keep it clean and to stop mosquitos breeding in it.
2. Place a water tray (again, really just a very large pot plant saucer) both out the back and in the front yard, in the middle of a large area of open space, for the birds. If you wish for something more decorative and protected from the dogs and cats, use a bird-bath. Remember to regularly change the water and refill the container. (but this is easy to do whenever you go outside.)
3. If you use a sprinkler do use it during the daylight hours as well, so the wildlife can also benefit from it. (And if you don't use a sprinkler this way, or if you use some other watering system such as a drip system, please, please put out alternative sources of water for the birds and other wildlife.)
4. If your clothes washing water goes onto the yard also remember that the birds and other wildlife could be trying to drink from this hose, and will probably be foraging around the area where the water went. So

- a) always use the most environmentally friendly clothes washing detergents or it will have an impact upon your garden and upon the wildlife
 - b) make sure that this water does not run out in the open where birds can be attracted to it. Put the hose away from areas the birds use, and hide the end of the hose under a pile of mulch. This will also stop the water from evaporating so quickly and aid in its distribution, while hiding it from the eyes of thirsty wildlife who should not be drinking detergent loaded water.
5. If you live near a reserve or open grassland area where there can be the occasional kangaroo or other wildlife, in time of drought think about putting out buckets of water for them if their normal water source has dried up. Place this as far from the house as possible, as wildlife and people often don't mix. Nor do you want to endanger wildlife by enticing them to where they can get killed by dogs, or hit by cars. If you have wildlife and stock also try and allow some water for the wildlife - biodiversity is important for all of our futures.

(If you had a pond or dam that has dried up, this could also have been used as a watering source for a variety of migrating birds. Many of these birds, whose bodily resources are already taxed by migrating thousands of kilometres, really depend upon these dams or watercourses, and need a chain of watercourses or ponds so that they can achieve their goal. So if your dam is dry do you have enough water for a smaller ornamental pond? This can be easily made and uses little water.)

Remember, all five systems are important for biodiversity - and for our local environment. And always check that the various water containers are full.

If you wish to do more:

Consider having a still water pond somewhere. See the SLSG info sheet on "Making a wildlife friendly, native landscaped frogpond" for more information on creating a pond.