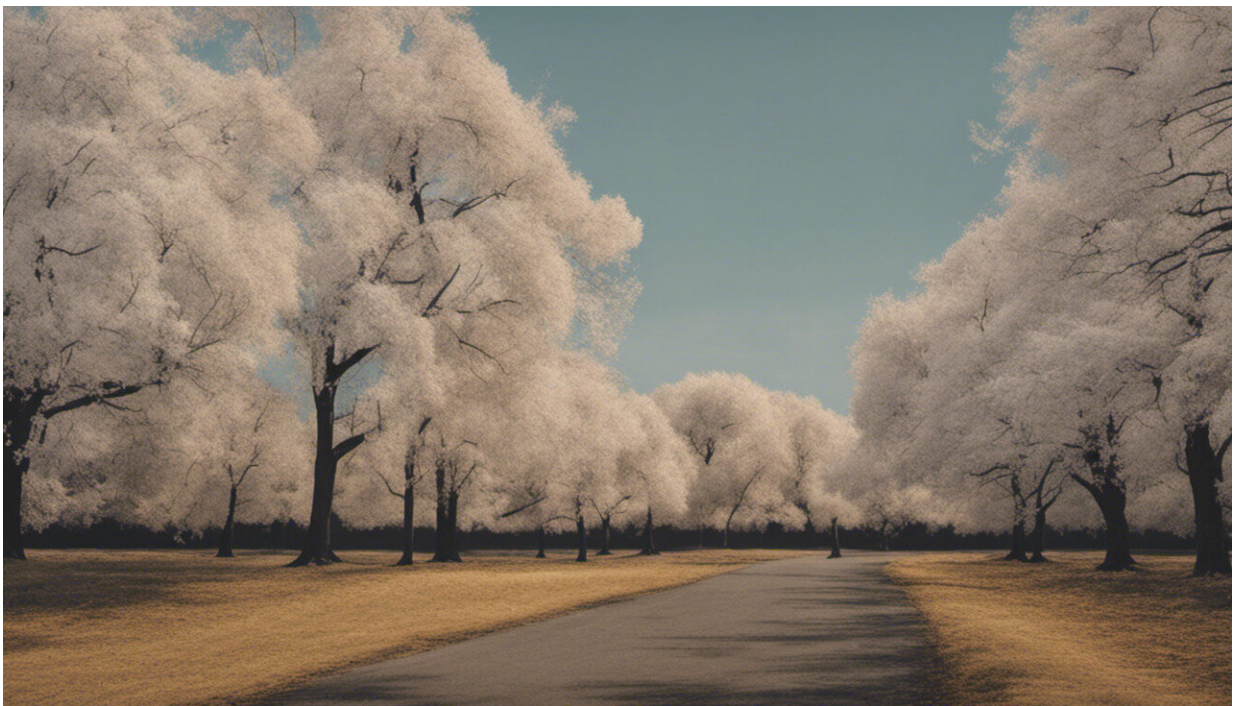


# Yes, the state of the environment is grim, but you can make a difference, right in your own neighborhood

July 21 2022, by Kylie Soanes

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

The newly released [State of the Environment](#) report paints a predictably grim picture. Species are in decline, ecosystems are at breaking point, and threats abound. For many of us, it can feel like a problem that's too big, too complex and too distant to solve.

But this report also shows every Australian can be on the conservation frontline. We can save species in the places we live and work. According to the report, Australia's cities and towns are home to more than 96% of our population and 46% of threatened species. We have [mapped the occurrence](#) of hundreds of threatened species in urban areas.

We share our cities with iconic koalas, charming [gang-gang cockatoos](#) and floral wonders like [Caley's grevillea](#). And, as the report notes, some species are found only in urban areas—our cities and towns are the last chance to save them from extinction. What an incredible opportunity to reconnect Australians with our fantastic natural heritage and protect it at the same time.

Our [research](#) shows a huge appetite for saving nature in cities. Councils, industry and [community groups](#) all over the country are working to make change.

Here are five things we can think about to improve the state of our [city](#) environments.

## **1. Small but mighty**

Don't have a lot of space? That's OK! Whether it's a small pond, garden strip or solitary gum tree, these often provide a key resource that isn't found elsewhere in the nearby landscape. This means they pack a punch when it comes to supporting local nature.



The forested bridge across Compton Road, Brisbane, enables wildlife to travel safely between two areas of natural habitat. Credit: Kylie Soanes, Author provided

And resources like these all add up. [Researchers found](#) that a collection of small, urban grassland reserves supported more [native plants](#), and rarer species, than just a few large reserves.

So while making one small change might feel futile, it can make a big difference.

## 2. Embracing the 'in between'

Conservation doesn't just happen in nature reserves, which is good, because [urban areas](#) don't have many. Backyards are already making huge contributions through "[gardens for wildlife](#)" initiatives.

What role do our [#gardens](#) play in [#Wildlife #conservation](#) This study found that they play an important role in [#Australia](#) for the critically endangered ringtail possum <https://t.co/kb6Acb4OD3> . This shows the importance of our gardens for wildlife. [#2020EBE #Conservationmatters pic.twitter.com/QsOr6hbQZD](#)

— Emily Thrift (@EmilyZoologist1) [December 13, 2020](#)

But what about the more unconventional spaces? [We found](#) city-dwelling species take advantage of roadsides, schoolyards, carpark gardens, railway stations and rooftops. These [are all opportunities](#) for us to make a little more space for nature in cities.

## 3. Grand designs for wildlife

People aren't the only ones facing a housing crisis—wildlife struggle too. The tree hollows, rock piles and fallen wood that many species call home are often removed in favor of sleek lines and tidy urban spaces.

You can provide valuable real estate for local critters by adding [nesting boxes](#), [bee hotels](#) and [lizard lounges](#). And simply leaving a designated "messy patch" in your garden improves the local habitat too.

## 4. Creative connections

Moving safely through cities can be risky for wildlife. They have to

navigate cars, fences, roaming pets and swathes of concrete.

Many councils and road agencies are looking at creative ways to help wildlife get from A to B. Solutions range from rope bridges for [western Sydney's sugar gliders](#) and [tunnels for Melbourne's bandicoots](#) to [forested bridges](#) for Brisbane's bush birds. Some gardeners in Bunbury even built their own backyard "possum bridges" to help the endangered western ringtail possum in their neighborhoods.

## Create a B&B for native birds in your backyard

The type of plants you need will vary on whether your local birds feed on insects, nectar, seed, fruit or meat:

**Insect-eaters** like to eat invertebrates – which live on the bark and leaves of shrubs and trees, or on the ground. Consider white flowers like **kunzea**, **tea tree** and **hakeas**, yellow flowers of **wattles** and members of the **Fabaceae family**, and the red and yellow of **grevilleas** and **banksias**. Avoid big hybrid grevilleas and bottlebrush – they attract big bossy birds that will chase away others and decrease diversity.



For **nectar-eating birds**, you can plant **banksia**, **bottlebrush eucalyptus**, **grevillea**, **hakea** and **melaleuca**.

Visiting **seed-eaters** will enjoy **acacia** (wattle) and **casuarina** (sheoak).



Credit: Wes Mountain/The Conversation, CC BY-ND

## 5. People power

Having [threatened species](#) live close to people is typically seen as bit of "negative" in the conservation world. But this closeness can be an advantage if the community is aware and engaged.

Orchids like the [sunshine diuris](#) and Frankston spider orchid would surely be extinct if not for countless hours of volunteer work, crowd-funding and the passion of the local community.

Get involved through your local council or ["Friends of" groups](#) to see how you can support nature in your neck of the woods.

## Urban habitats—often small and scrappy, always valuable

There are so many wonderful ways to support nature in cities. Recent examples include [conservation goats saving native skinks](#), floating [habitat rafts in city waterways](#) and using [flowerpots](#) on concrete sea walls to support marine life. New ideas are being explored and tested all over the country.

Some of the best examples bring all these ideas together. For example, [Melbourne's Pollinator Corridor](#), led by the Heart Gardening Project, helps individual community members convert their own small urban patch into a bee-friendly garden. When complete, 200 individual gardens will create an 8km pollinator paradise between two of the city's largest parks.

Right now, efforts to save nature in cities are driven by champions—individuals in our communities, local councils or industry who see an opportunity to make a difference, no matter how small, and fight to make it happen. Imagine what we could achieve if more of us pitched in.

So, look around. Can you add just one small patch? Contact your [local council](#) about turning a neglected roadside strip into a pollinator paradise? Or maybe set up a little B&B for wildlife in your backyard?

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