

Red-browed finch.



Small native birds are being lost from our urban areas. The Habitat Network aims to recreate habitat corridors through public lands and backyards to reconnect isolated populations of native birds, animals and plants.

By listening, looking and considering—the management of bushland and gardens can improve habitat for native birds and native bees.

If small native birds are not present in an area the environment is probably out of balance:

- it may be too open without sufficient protective dense shrubs and diverse layers of vegetation
- **in a garden**, there may be too many plants with bright showy flowers, such as hybrid grevilleas, which attract territorial honeyeaters
- **in bushland**, edges may be too open and need to be closed with native shrubs and vines to discourage larger birds from entering the lower levels.

## Planting a habitat haven for small birds



### inner sanctum

Taller, softer shrubs 1-2 metres in height. Provides a safe haven away from bigger birds. A vine can provide protective cover.

### protective circle

Spiky, protective shrubs 1-2 metres high, planted just over a stretched hand distance apart.

### biodiverse shrub circle

Small, attractive shrubs add interest to a garden for people, birds and animals, and provide food and shelter.

### eating out

Mixed native grasses and ground covers offer a variety of foods from seeds to insects.

## Why preserve native habitat?

Preserving and re-creating the right kind of habitat has many advantages for us and for small birds. Native habitat provides a place for:

- migratory or travelling birds to stop, rest and revive
- small birds, insects and animals to live safely
- new populations of birds to establish if bushfires have destroyed similar local habitat
- introducing children to the wonders of the natural world.

### To learn more:

- join the Habitat Network by contacting Bev at [info@iewf.org](mailto:info@iewf.org) or 0419 206 253—there is no obligation except to preserve and create native habitat, and we will keep you informed of related activities and give advice on habitat creation
- join your local bushcare or landcare program
- visit us at [www.habitatnetwork.org](http://www.habitatnetwork.org) and [www.iewf.org](http://www.iewf.org).



# weed removal & habitat

with examples from Southeast Australia

Male and female superb fairy-wren in a lantana patch that has been retained for them on an urban bushcare site.

## before you start ... look, listen & consider

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## Look—hidden habitat

We often fail to recognise useful habitat because it looks messy or weedy. A small patch overgrown with vines (native or exotic) or weeds might still provide great value for our small birds. These may be within bushland, on private property or in “waste” land. Unless we stop, listen and look we may inadvertently remove the last safe haven for the small birds in the area.

When small birds lose their sanctuary or nesting site they are forced into the open where they may be attacked by dogs, cats and larger birds such as ravens, noisy miners, wattlebirds or other territorial birds. Or they may simply be unable to feed or nest. The result is the same—fewer small birds.

Many small birds do not travel far so once lost may never return.

Look to see what plants the small birds use. Tall trees, scattered shrubs and open grassy areas offer little protection for most small birds.

## Listen

We often hear small birds before we see them. A great family activity is to go for a walk early morning or late afternoon and **listen** for the birds in your backyard, nearby bushland and “waste” land. What can you hear? Listen for the sweet calls of small birds and get to know where they live.

Learn to recognise birds by getting a bird app for your mobile or visiting [www.birdsinbackyards.net](http://www.birdsinbackyards.net).

### Listen for native small birds

such as:

- eastern spinebill
- red-browed finch or firetail
- silvereye
- spotted pardalote
- superb fairy-wren
- white-browed scrubwren.



Native bee visiting Hardenbergia.

Fairy-wren nest in Hakea.

## Consider

Consider what you are hearing. Are the small birds just passing through or are they often found in the one area? If the latter then probably this is where they are living. If you are a bush regenerator or a home gardener please do not weed or tidy up this area until alternative, similarly structured native habitat is fully established and being used by small birds. Protect it as an important interim habitat area—ask your council to do the same.

Consider:

- how to expand the actively used habitat area using native plants
- how to recreate a similar structure of vegetation nearby using native plants
- how to create a connection with another habitat area
- who owns the land—you need to consult with the land owner prior to undertaking any work.

1 Eastern spinebill feeding in a cumquat tree. 2 Silvereye in a plum tree. 3 Spotted pardalote in a Hakea. 4 Superb fairy-wren hunting insects at a compost bin.

5 White-browed scrubwren perching in a messy corner of a garden.

## Creating habitat



The structure of plant havens used by small birds is like two or more concentric circles—closed and dense around the outside—more open yet protected on the inside (see the diagram on the other page).

To create a habitat haven, try reproducing what you see birds using with local native plants.

Closely plant a small area with, for example, *Ozothamnus* and *Leptospermum*. Around these plant spiky plants, such as *Hakea* and *Bursaria spinosa*, to create a protective circle. Finish with an outer circle of grasses and small shrubs as an additional food source.

Lightly prune the taller shrubs occasionally to thicken the foliage and allow grasses to seed. Avoid using pesticides. In your own garden, citrus trees make a useful addition to habitat. *Hardenbergia* over a fence also adds to habitat.

See [www.habitatnetwork.org](http://www.habitatnetwork.org) for more detail about creating habitat.

## Learn from the past

In our parents’ days there were untidy, productive areas at the back of the yard. Here we found the compost heap, citrus trees, native plants, native and food vines growing over fences and maybe the chook enclosure or an arbour, the incinerator, the veggie patch, piles of dirt and building materials. All of this added up to great biodiversity and habitat for many native small birds, lizards, frogs and insects.

Now, with our tidy yards, small native birds have become isolated in pockets within bushland, weedy “waste” land and in a few special back gardens.

Consider creating your own special corner in your backyard—a haven—which includes habitat and the elements of a sustainable garden.