

The top 10 actions you can take to make a difference for biodiversity

Factsheet

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Keeping dogs on leash in natural areas is a great way to help native animals and plants. Image: Karen Arnold, CCO 1.0

Australian nature is in trouble and needs all the help it can get. Many people want to make a difference but it can be hard to know what to do. And if you can only make a few small changes which ones would have the most impact?

Research led by RMIT University has asked this important question and identified 10 high priority actions that people can take to help nature. The actions are relatively easy to do and can deliver a large benefit for biodiversity.

This factsheet outlines what these actions are, why they are important and how to get started. It also explains how the research was undertaken.

According to multiple global studies, Australia has one of the highest per person biodiversity footprints in the world. There are 25 million people in Australia, so even small changes that people make can add up to a big difference for nature.

Why did we undertake this research?

Human behaviour is a major driver of the threats to nature. This means that how we act can also play an important role in supporting nature.

Many programs exist that promote actions like saving energy and water, and recycling, but before this study there was little guidance about how people can best act to protect biodiversity.

Our research aimed to identify the actions that people living in Victoria can take in their everyday lives to achieve the greatest biodiversity benefits. The findings can be applied by people living anywhere in Australia.

As well as providing guidance to individuals, the findings are useful to government programs that aim to work with the community to conserve biodiversity. The findings have already been adopted by the Victorian Government to inform the How Victorians can Act for Nature program.



The top action to help nature is to choose sustainable seafood by looking for the ASC and MSC certification labels on seafood products. Images: MSC, ASC

The top 10 actions you can take to make a difference for biodiversity

The top ten actions

This table shows the top ten priority actions that people can take to benefit biodiversity. These actions produce a high level of biodiversity benefit for relatively low effort. They were chosen because they are relatively easy, for example cost is not a significant barrier, and they are actions that many people can start doing now, therefore producing a large community effect.



Action beneficial for biodiversity	Why is it important?	Where to start...
1 Choose MSC and ASC certified seafood products.	Overfishing impacts sustainability of stocks and other species through by-catch.	Look for the blue Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) or green Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) certification labels on seafood products.
2 Keep your dog on a leash in natural areas including beaches, unless it is a designated dog off leash area.	Off-leash dogs disturb and attack native wildlife. When animals, like birds spend time fleeing dogs they miss out on time to eat, rest and feed their young.	Look up the dog off leash areas offered by your local government. Keep your dog on leash everywhere else.
3 Reduce beef and lamb consumption.	Beef and lamb production involves the clearing and overgrazing of natural habitats and culling of native predators.	Eat smaller serves of red meat. Swap red meat for poultry or MSC seafood, eat more plant-based foods like beans and nuts.
4 Donate to private land protection organisations.	Donations enable these organisations to protect land in perpetuity and to undertake important on-ground biodiversity management.	Check out national organisations like Australian Wildlife Conservancy and Bush Heritage Australia or local organisations like Mount Rothwell near Melbourne.
5 Choose biodiversity-friendly investments (e.g. sustainable super funds).	Your investment decisions can influence businesses to be more biodiversity positive.	Talk to your superannuation provider or start exploring the growing range of biodiversity-friendly investment funds now available.

Keeping pet cats contained indoors or in a secure cat run 24 hours per day saves over a hundred native animals each year in your local area. Indoor cats also live longer and healthier lives as they are protected from car accidents, dog attacks, cat fights and many diseases. Image: Tida Nou.



Action beneficial for biodiversity	Why is it important?	Where to start...
6 Donate to organisations that focus on threatened species and ecosystem advocacy.	Donations enable these groups to advocate on behalf of biodiversity, helping to create better planning and policy outcomes for biodiversity.	Explore the wide range of national and local environmental advocacy groups like: WWF Australia; Biodiversity Council; Environment Collective NT; and Environmental Defenders Office.
7 Plant and maintain a wildlife garden.	Urban areas are important to many threatened species populations. Wildlife gardening helps provide important habitat and increases the habitat connectivity in suburbs. (Wildlife gardening also has health and wellbeing benefits for people.)	Your local government or native nursery is often a great source of resources and advice.
8 Vote for political candidates based on environmental policies.	Electing candidates who support pro-environmental policies creates important changes in government investment, planning, policy and programs.	Find out about the policies of your local candidates and their parties, and have a talk to your MPs.
9 Responsible cat ownership – keep your cat fully contained.	Research shows that every pet cat kept inside saves 110 native animals every year on average. There are around 55 pet cats per square kilometre in our suburbs. If they are allowed to roam outside their collective impact on wildlife is huge!	Before you choose to get a cat think carefully about if you can commit to keeping it inside or set up a secure cat run.
10 Advocate publicly for pest animal control.	Pest species like feral horses, cattle, pigs, cats, foxes, rabbits, camels take a huge toll on native species and ecosystems, as can native species in some situations when they are overabundant, such as kangaroos.	Learn more on the Invasive Species Council website and tell your friends.



What a delicious looking veggie burger! Reducing beef and lamb consumption directly benefits biodiversity. Given the availability of alternatives like chicken, MSC certified fish and protein rich plant based foods like beans and nuts, reducing red meat consumption is also a relatively easy way to reduce your impact on nature. Image: Theo Crazzolara Flickr CC BY 2.0

Planting a wildlife garden helps to support threatened species in urban environments by increasing and improving habitat. It is also beneficial for the health and well being of people. Image: Doug Ford, Flickr, CC BY 2.0



How we did the research

We asked 22 conservation experts with a diversity of expertise and from a range of organisations to contribute to the research. The experts we consulted included ecologists, behaviour change specialists, psychologists, conservation scientists, threatened species specialists, social-ecological systems researchers, and science communication experts.

Firstly, during a workshop we asked participants to identify potential actions that people could take to benefit nature. We undertook the research in Melbourne and focused on Victorian biodiversity examples.

We did not consider actions that are only relevant to small groups in order to identify actions relevant to most people. We also did not focus on actions that were only influential for biodiversity through their climate-related impacts.

In total the experts identified 27 separate actions that individuals could engage in to either benefit, or reduce negative impacts on, biodiversity. It included actions related to consumption, social and lifestyle behaviours, stewardship, advocacy and time and financial donations.

Secondly, we ranked the actions by asking the experts to estimate:

1. the amount of benefit the action would have for biodiversity,
2. the potential for people to make the change (for example, it is easy to switch toilet paper but hard to switch your house).

We then collected information about how often people already do actions from previously published reports, market research and peer-reviewed literature. If many people were already doing the action there may not be a need to encourage a behaviour that most people already do.

By considering the three factors for each of the 27 actions identified we ranked the actions and produced the “top 10” list of priority actions that everyday people can adopt to help protect nature.

Who was involved in the research?

The research was a Threatened Species Recovery Hub project led by RMIT University in collaboration with Monash University, Deakin University, Birdlife Australia, Zoos Victoria, Outdoors Victoria, Nature Stewards, the Victorian Government, and the Office of the Threatened Species Commissioner.

The research received funding from the Australian Government through the National Environmental Science Program, and the Victorian Government’s Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (now called DEECA).

READ MORE

Selinske, MJ et al. (2020) [Identifying and prioritizing human behaviors that benefit biodiversity](https://doi.org/10.1111/csp2.249). *Conservation Science and Practice*, <https://doi.org/10.1111/csp2.249>



Your investment decisions can influence businesses to be more biodiversity positive. Many superannuation providers now have biodiversity-friendly investment options.
Image: Mathieu Stern, Unsplash

Story by Matt Selinske, Sarah Bekessy and Jaana Dielenberg

