

POSSIBLE MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES FOR INDIAN MYNA CONTROL

Public concern about Indian Mynas has stimulated interest in recent years to reduce its numbers. These efforts generally fall into four broad categories:

- individual solo effort by members of the public
- local government managed programs
- local government-facilitated community-based programs
- community-led action through community groups.

As mynas are now widespread across the urban landscape – and into urban reserves and nearby woodlands – a concerted, concentrated, coordinated and sustained action is needed to have a long term impact on their numbers. Ideally, action needs to be at the household, commercial and government level so that the whole area is adequately covered.

The activities that need to be undertaken include raising public awareness; educating the community; reducing the opportunities for mynas to feed, breed and roost; capture and disposal activities; monitoring and research.

There are several ways councils can respond to the community expectation for action. One way is through a dedicated and totally funded local government managed control program, while a second way is facilitation and support for community-action. What is clear is that a ‘no action’ approach is no longer likely to be acceptable to ratepayers.

A brief analysis of the possible management structures follows.

1. Local government managed programs

Local governments are well placed to undertake myna reduction programs. Informed and environmentally-aware local government officers have access to resources and knowledge which means the problem can be approached in a systematic and holistic manner. Moreover, as the closest level of government to the community, they are generally seen by the public as the point for action in dealing with local issues.

Public awareness and education

Local governments have advantages in spreading information to the public about the problems caused by mynas – and what the council and public are doing or can do about it. Some of the ways include:

- including brochures and pamphlets about mynas in with the quarterly rate notices to ratepayers
- having posters and brochures in the reception areas of council offices
- holding information workshops, particularly with environmentally conscious local groups, such as Bushcare and Landcare groups, local bird-watching and gardening groups
- have a week dedicated to raising community awareness of the environment, with information about mynas a part of that
- including information about mynas on the environmental section of the council’s website, with links to other myna-control information sites.

Control activities

The noise from mynas congregating in large roosts in the evening; the fouling of backyards, shopping centres and schools; and the perceived environmental and health threat posed by mynas will generally mean that local government will be under pressure to respond to the community’s concerns. As well, raising public awareness about the threats posed by mynas will inevitably lead to

community expectations of control actions. Many local governments are very active with their own dedicated control problems and there is quite an array of things that are and can be done.

These include:

- requiring sound waste management practices by restaurants and shopping centres so that mynas do not have easy access to food scraps. This can be by way of requiring those businesses to ensure the lids of their waste skips are shut so that mynas cannot scavenge in there for food waste
- introducing myna-proof rubbish bins – these bins do not allow mynas to scavenge for food scraps
- block up gaps into the roof cavity of local government buildings so that mynas do not nest in there. Amend building regulations relating to commercial buildings to require the installation of anti-bird roosting spikes on places where mynas might otherwise be able to roost under cover. This also is relevant for pigeons
- undertaking their own trapping program on council-owned property. A particularly successful effort has been that of the Tamworth Regional Council at their waste centre, where a trapping program has significantly reduced the number of mynas and starlings in the area.
- developing and supporting a community trapping program undertaken by council officers or contracted out, with council-owned traps being rotated gratis to interested members of the community or provided to hire companies
- operating a trap hire or lease arrangement for community trappers and commercial businesses
- holding trap-building workshops for interested community groups
- engaging commercial pest bird management companies to target specific location myna roosts hot spots with avi-paste poison. As myna faecal dust/droppings can be a health hazard, it is important to ensure that myna numbers are minimised around schools, shopping centres, hospitals and food factories/warehouses
- until the use of car exhaust is accepted as the more humane method of euthanasia of pest birds, establishing CO2 euthanasing centres for community trappers so that myna disposal is humanely carried out quickly, painless and stress-free
- in rural areas, netting and shooting of myna roost sites. Shooting can be a very effective control measure in rural areas where the myna density is low.

It is important that a landscape-scale approach be taken to myna control in metropolitan areas. Activity in one council district will be diminished if the adjacent councils are not undertaking similar control activities.

Monitoring and research

Local governments are also well located to support monitoring and research efforts. Council officers, whilst undertaking a range of outside duties, are well placed to notice myna behaviour, particularly nesting and roosting sites which can be recorded for subsequent direct action by the council or by community groups.

2. Integrated Community — Local Government program

This approach sees local government and community groups act in a collaborative way to undertake a control program. This model has many advantages. It reduces the high financial impost (and possibly legal liability) on local government, but has a high impact because of the involvement of many local people. Local government facilitates and supports community activity, but some of the

high cost aspects of myna control – staff time and trap ownership and operation – are foregone by the council. Community groups can perform those tasks, and generally with a higher level of intensity than is able to be provided by local government acting alone.

In this approach, local governments initiate the activity by facilitating the establishment of a community-action group, supporting and coordinating initial activity and providing public credibility and education materials. The community role is in trapping, helping to establish and then maintaining the network of community groups, raising public awareness, and data collation and monitoring.

Under this model, the respective roles of the local government and the community groups are as follows.

Local government

The local councils initiate the process and do the following:

- collate the names and addresses of people contacting the council to express their concern about Indian Mynas
- develop, publish and disseminate various public information and education materials
- identify and contact relevant existing groups in the community who have an interest in environmental and conservation activities about a prospective myna control program
- advertise and hold a public meeting of people interested in participating in a myna control program
- at the public meeting, call for people who are prepared to act as coordinators across the local government area (LGA) (in the case of rural council, one for each town, village, district in the LGA), drawn from interested people from the data base of callers to the council, existing community groups and people attending the public information meeting. The contact by the council is subsequently only then with the coordinators of the local community-action groups. The council facilitator subsequently then refers callers to their local community coordinator (this avoids what could otherwise be a time-consuming and duplicative effort)
- train coordinators and assist them in establishing their own local community-action group
- develop model protocols on animal welfare, on trap management and disposal for adoption by community-action groups
- organise an initial trap-building workshop to train the community-action group members on how to make traps. After initial training, Men's Sheds and other such groups can be a ready source of traps to members of the various community-action groups across the LGA.
- provide a contact point within council for community-action group support, as needed. This is to be someone who is able to respond to various enquiries by the coordinators on the program.
- provide facilities across the LGA for the humane euthanasia of trapped mynas and their disposal, and train a number of community-action group members who can then operate the facility (such facilities are only needed if there is a restriction on the use of car exhaust for euthanasia).

Community-action group role

The community-action group is responsible for trapping (the community group members make, own and operate the traps), collating capture data, and for generating and sustaining community involvement. It can also undertake monitoring and survey work. Specific activities include:

- the coordinators, with the initial assistance from the local government officer, set up community-action groups

- once established, the community-action groups promote the cause of myna control through public speaking, distribution of pamphlets, displays at markets etc.
- the coordinators and community-action groups develop and maintain a network with the other groups across the LGA
- building and distributing traps. In a number of areas, Men's Sheds or other such groups, build and sell traps. The council might also run a trap lending/hiring program with traps owned by the council. However, the success of household trapping programs rests heavily on high numbers of traps being operated across the community. For this to occur traps need to be low cost and easy to operate. The various hand-made traps that are now around (e.g. PeeGees trap) are relatively easy to make and cheap, thereby allowing community-action groups or Men's Sheds to make them in high numbers.
- collating capture data
- the coordinator liaise with the council contact officer as needed on control matters.

This division of responsibilities enables a control program to be set and operated at low cost to the council but with potentially high impact, depending on the enthusiasm of the community organisation.

The model is a very efficient and effective structure for a myna control program. It takes advantages of the strengths of both the local government and of a community-action group. This approach is now working very effectively in the Hawkesbury, Eurobodalla, Wingecarribee and Tweed Heads areas.

3. Community-led action through community groups

An alternative to the integrated council/community model is community-led action through a stand-alone community group. The Canberra Indian Myna Action Group Inc. is an example of this model.

In this structure, the group is set up by interested members of the public without the initial instigation, facilitation or coordination from local or state governments. In this regard, it is set up and operates just like many other community groups.

Once established as a community-action group, the group and its members accept responsibility for all aspects of the myna control program – public awareness and education, trapping and euthanasia, and promotion.

The above three management structures each have particular advantages. The choice of approach will depend on the interest in the issue by local government staff or community members. In some circumstances, local government may need to take the lead to stimulate community interest, while in other cases members of the community with a profound interest in the natural environment may take the initiative. Irrespective of the initial starting point, it is bound to be the case that the results will be better if the community and the government are of the same mind as to the need for concerted action.