

Returning some balance — tackling Indian Mynas

By Bill Handke, President, Canberra Indian Myna Action Group Inc.

Indian Mynas have been voted the most hated pest in Australia, beating cane toads, feral cats and foxes. — ABC Wild Watch Quest for Pests 2005.

A delight in living in Canberra is the close connection we can have with our natural environment: our native plants and our wildlife. As Friends of the Botanic Gardens well appreciate, the link between people and our native plants and animals is brought together particularly well in the Australian National Botanic Gardens. Many of us will seek to replicate this in our own gardens: using native plants that bring in honeyeaters, wrens, parrots etc.

But our natural environment and our gardens are at serious risk from an introduced bird: the Indian Myna (or Common Myna). These birds are both a serious environmental threat to our wildlife and a major nuisance in people's backyards, around schools and shopping centres. By taking over nesting hollows and preying on eggs, chicks and young they are a threat to our native rosellas, kookaburras etc and small mammals, like sugar gliders. Many people are also greatly disturbed by the way they scare native birds away from their gardens and foul their patios and barbeque areas. Schools and shopping centres have very high numbers of these pests, while mynas around cafes can be a health risk.



The Indian Myna matter in Canberra has taken a positive turn with over 10 300 Indian Mynas now removed from around Canberra and Queanbeyan by 230 backyard trappers over the past year. The trappers, members of the community-action group, Canberra Indian Myna Action Group Inc (CIMAG), have made a huge difference. There are now regular reports that myna numbers have dropped significantly in local areas, native birds are coming back into backyards and rosellas last breeding season returned to nesting hollows.

Kambah has been a particularly successful area for trapping. With 22 people with traps, 3061 mynas have been removed from Kambah over the past year. Other highly successful suburbs are Garran, Duffy, Pearce, Theodore, Aranda and Hall.

This is wonderful news for our native wildlife. And some considerable respite for people who are concerned about the presence of mynas in their backyards.

But the job has a long way to go. Indian Mynas continue to be seen in big numbers in many parts around Canberra: around shopping centres and in areas where there has been little or no trapping. Gunghalin marketplace is a major roosting site with some thousands of mynas roosting communally at night and fouling the area.

More needs to be done to reduce the opportunities mynas have for feeding, breeding and roosting. All Canberrans can help in this area: by not leaving cat or dog food out during the day and by not feeding the birds directly; by blocking holes in their roofs and eaves and other areas around their homes that mynas can use as nesting hollows; and by removing pencil pines and similar dense-foliage exotic trees that are used as roost trees at night.

The trap CIMAG members use is quite compact and readily made from our blueprints. We also hold workshops where people can make traps up under our guidance, and we make traps up for members at a cost. Alternatively, people can also buy commercial traps that are very effective.

If you want to know more about the activities of CIMAG, contact Bill Handke, the President of CIMAG (phone 02 6231 7461 or email handke@grapevine.net.au) or go to the CIMAG website: www.indianmynaaction.org.au .

You can have native birds or Indian Mynas – but not both. — Ian Fraser, local naturalist & 2006 Winner Aust Natural History Medallion