



backyard buddies™

get more enjoyment from our native plants and animals



B-mail is the monthly e-newsletter for Backyard Buddies.

Backyard Buddies is an initiative of the Foundation for National Parks & Wildlife.

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Flying Colours at the Height of Summer

This month, you may just run into some very colourful backyard buddies in the air, underfoot, and right in front of your face.

When is a Frog like a Motorbike?

When it sounds like one! This isn't a riddle out of 'Alice in Wonderland' - we're talking about the Motorbike Frog of course. It's no joke, this amazing frog actually sounds like a motorbike changing gears, followed by some growls and croaks. As one of the most commonly seen frogs in south-western Australia (especially in Perth gardens), it's also one of the most entertaining.



Distribution map of the Motorbike Frog, *Litoria moorei*.

[Click to watch a video of a Motorbike Frog calling at night.](#) You can also listen to their call at the top right-hand side of this site: [click 'Frog sound' to hear it.](#)

Motorbike Frogs call in summer, so listen out for them now if you are in the south-east of Western Australia.

These frogs are large, growing up to 10 cm, with long back legs. After a sunbake, they can be green with gold mottling, or in colder conditions they can be dark brown or olive coloured. Their bellies are pale green to light brown.

[See lots more images of Motorbike Frogs in different colour variations here.](#)

Tadpoles and adults of this species need to sunbathe for an hour or two each day for healthy growth.

Keep an eye out for Motorbike Frog eggs in ponds and permanent water sources with lots of vegetation near you this month, as they breed from spring to late summer each year. Females lay their eggs in clumps on vegetation floating in a pond or growing slightly underwater.

The tadpoles grow up to 8 cm long, and swim in schools when small. They are usually a translucent yellow colour with some darker areas, but become darker with deep fins and pointed tails as they grow. They can be hard to spot as they hide amongst plants and roots in permanent water sources. They mainly eat algae. In March to April, Motorbike Frog tadpoles turn into frogs.



Just hanging around with the entertaining Motorbike Frog. Photo: R. Vandelft.

Motorbike Frogs live mainly on the ground, but can also climb up low tree branches or shrubs, amongst rocks or even up brick walls and windows to a height of 2 m! These adventurous frogs love to eat other smaller frogs and insects, so they are good to have in the garden to keep the bug numbers in check.

These frogs live in streams, swamps, dams and ponds - including suburban garden ponds.

TIP

Have you ever thought about establishing a native frog or fish pond in your garden? There's no time like the present. [Click here to read free resources on establishing a garden pond for your local froggies or even native fish.](#)

DID YOU KNOW

The fingers of the Motorbike Frog don't have webbing, but their toes do. They also have prominent toe discs. This frog has many names, including the Moore's Frog, the Western Bell Frog, the Western Green and Golden Bell Frog, and the Western Green Tree Frog.

A Dainty Visitor Loves Your Lemons!

The Dainty Swallowtail Butterfly is also known as the Dingy Swallowtail or Small Citrus Butterfly - but it isn't dingy at all! You'll see these stunning butterflies in flight right up until May.



Distribution map of the Dainty Swallowtail Butterfly, *Papilio anactus*.

Adult Dainty Swallowtails are a lovely sight to see. Look out for them near citrus plants. They are black with grey, white, and smaller blue and red spots on their wings, and yellow markings along their bodies. The female's wingspan is up to 7.2 cm while the male is slightly smaller, with his growing up to 6.7 cm.

This gorgeous butterfly can be attracted to any garden within its range by planting caterpillar food plants such as native and introduced citrus. Adult females will only lay their eggs on new growth.

[Click to read a good guide to creating a butterfly attracting garden!](#) You can also read more Backyard Buddies info about butterflies, [by clicking here.](#)

The male patrols his territory around a food plant - a serious duty masked by his graceful, carefree and dainty flight. Their flight is often slow and lazy, but they can take off in a great hurry if disturbed.

[Read a factsheet about butterflies here.](#)

The caterpillars of the Dainty Swallowtail are blue-black in colour, with two rows of yellow-orange spots on its side and many small pale blue or white spots. It has two rows of short spines that are not dangerous or poisonous along its back.



Dainty Swallowtail Butterfly caterpillar. Photo: [Beth Mantle](#).

To protect themselves from predators, the caterpillars extend a bright red-orange forked organ from behind their heads called an 'osmeterium'. It emits strong and stinky chemicals smelling of citrus to deter many creatures that would otherwise make a tasty snack of an unprotected caterpillar.

When the caterpillar is about 3.5 to 4 cm long and has munched enough citrus leaves, soft new growth, and the occasional flower and bud, it turns green with orange-yellow spots on its back and some small scattered pale blue and white spots.



An adult Dainty Swallowtail Butterfly feeding on nectar from flowers. Photo: [Michael Jefferies](#).

Next the caterpillar creates a grey or brown pupa with green patches - these look like the citrus bark onto which they are fixed, so they are camouflaged remarkably well.

During summer it takes about two weeks for the butterfly to emerge from the pupa. During autumn it takes four weeks for the butterfly to emerge, but often these pupas stay dormant over winter and the butterflies don't emerge until spring.

These butterflies are thought to live all over Australia, but are more common in the eastern states. Its range is spreading because of the expansion of citrus orchards.

[Click to read a story \(with nice images\) of a couple that reared a Dainty Swallowtail Butterfly from a caterpillar.](#)



Pupa of the Dainty Swallowtail Butterfly. Photo: [Donald Hobern](#).

TIP

Plant Native Finger Lime (*Citrus australasica*), Native Lime (*Citrus garrawayae*) or Desert Lime (*Citrus glauca*) as these attract Dainty Swallowtail Butterflies, as well as Capaneus Swallowtail, Orchard Swallowtail and Ambrax Swallowtail Butterflies. They just love citrus, but they definitely don't like pesticides or chemicals so avoid using them in your garden.

DID YOU KNOW

Dainty Swallowtail Butterflies are the smallest swallowtail butterflies in Australia.

Sounds Like a Wind Up Toy!

Next time you see a Crested Pigeon, don't just ignore it. Check out the cool patches of colour that they have on their wings! These timid birds have lovely glossy green and purple patches on their wings - have you ever noticed them before? They also have cute pink legs and feet.



Distribution map of the Crested Pigeon, *Ocyphaps lophotes*.

Crested Pigeons are grey-coloured native birds with brown, black and pinkish markings. They are usually found around water, as they need to drink every day. Listen out for their 'whoop-whoop-whoop-whoop' call. [Click here to listen.](#)

Crested Pigeons are a fairly common sight around rural and urban areas, as is the sound they make when they take to the skies. Listen out for their characteristic whistling flight, produced by air passing over a special modified primary feather upon their wings. [You can hear it in this video at around 1 minute 45 seconds.](#) Watch as the Crested Pigeon lands too - it swings its tail high into the air almost as if celebrating its successful return to the earth.

As its name implies, this pigeon has a great head decoration - an upright crest. It is one of only two Australian pigeons with an upright crest - the Spinifex Pigeon is the other species, and it is much smaller than the Crested Pigeon with cinnamon coloured feathers and a bright red patch on its face.

Crested Pigeons mainly drink and feed in the morning and evening, but will feed at other times if a good opportunity presents itself.

These birds are breeding, building nests and raising chicks right now, as they usually breed from September to March each year.

[Click to watch a video of Crested Pigeons courting and mating. PG rated.](#) The female gets a long massage/grooming session from her mate afterward. How considerate.



Check out the cool psychedelic colours on the wings of the timid Crested Pigeon. Photos: [Arthur Chapman](#).

The Crested Pigeon builds a delicate nest of twigs in a tree or dense bush. The male and female pigeon take turns sitting on their two eggs, and both take care of the young once they hatch. The babies stay in the nest for about 3 weeks and leave the nest after another 3 weeks. How quickly they grow up!

TIP

Pigeons love to eat native seeds, and a few leaves and insects too. Plant Blueberry Ash (*Elaeocarpus reticulatus*) as pigeons and lizards like to eat the fallen berries. Common Wallaby Grass (*Danthonia caespitosa*), Kangaroo Grass (*Themeda australis*), Tussock Grass (*Poa labillardieri*), Flinders Range Wattle, (*Acacia iteaphylla*), Mudgee Wattle (*Acacia spectabilis*), and Red Fruited Saw Sedge (*Gahnia sieberiana*) are all great natives to plant to attract and feed Crested Pigeons.

DID YOU KNOW

These birds are a lot smarter than you may think! [Click here to read an interesting article from ABC Science about pigeon intelligence.](#)



Birthday or special occasion coming up?

Why not give a virtual gift of 'Wuvvy Duvvy Wombats' or 'Plant a native for a Rainbow Lorikeet to munch'?

You put a smile on your loved one's dial, and help the environment at the same time, too!

What more could you ask for from a great gift? [Click to find out more.](#)

Little Troublemaker - St Andrews Cross Spider

Before you get worried about spiders in the garden, it might just pay to take a closer look (from a safe distance of course). If it's a St Andrew's Cross Spider hanging around, you're in luck! [Click to identify spiders in your area based on images.](#)



Distribution map of the St Andrew's Cross Spider, *Argiope keyserlingi*.

St Andrew's Cross Spiders are fantastic backyard buddies as they spin big webs that easily snare insects such as flies, mosquitoes, moths and other bugs. They are not aggressive towards people and their bite is not toxic.

The webs of St Andrew's Cross Spiders are also fascinating to look at because of

their decorations. These spiders get their name from the bluish-white cross pattern that they create in the centre of their web, which looks like the St Andrew's cross on the Scottish flag. [Click to view the flag and the St Andrew's cross.](#)

The purpose of the cross decoration has long been a bit of mystery. It was first thought to add strength to the web and make it more stable, but more recent research seems to think that it assists with attracting prey. This cross reflects UV light very strongly and draws in flying insects, which use UV light to locate food sources like flowers and navigate amongst vegetation.



The distinctive cross of the adult female spider's web - seen from below. Photo: [Michael Jefferies](#).

The cross on the web also confuses predators into thinking the spider is much larger than it is, and warns them to stay away as the effort required from a bird to remove the sticky web from its feathers after attempting to catch the spider is considerable. Very cluey spiders!

When threatened, the St Andrew's Cross Spider drops from the web (bungee jumping with a safety line) or shakes it so vigorously that both the spider and its cross become a blur, confusing the attacker.

Young spiders don't make the distinctive cross on their webs, but instead create a wild and crazy zigzag pattern around the centre of the web, which is also a treat to sneak a peek at. [Click here to see a picture of it.](#)

Female St Andrew's Cross Spiders are also very photogenic because of their fantastic colours. The female grows up to



St Andrew's Cross Spiders are most commonly seen in summertime and sit with their legs in pairs. Photo: [Andrea Schaffer](#).

16 mm in body length and has a silver, yellow, red and black banded upper abdomen with two longways yellow stripes below.

Males are a bit less exciting, as they are mainly brown and cream coloured. Like most male spiders they are smaller than the female, and only grow up to 4 mm in body length. If you count the legs, males grow up to 15 mm from leg to leg - about the size of the female's body, not including her long, long legs!

Adult females build webs up to 1 m across usually in front of a bushy plant. [Click to watch a video of a St Andrew's Cross Spider building her web.](#) Their webs are usually about 1-2 m above the ground, so watch where you walk when you step out into the garden this summer so that you can enjoy your buddies rather than getting a fright from them.

TIP

It's great to have insects and spiders around your garden. Spiders will control your insect numbers, but both spiders and insects will also be a great food source for lizards and birds such as Silvereyes and Friarbirds. You won't have the prettiest backyard buddies showing up in your garden unless you have their animal and plant food sources around too - so it pays to have lots of different buddies in the garden.

DID YOU KNOW

Male St Andrew's Cross Spiders put their life on the line to mate with a female. They can sometimes lose legs in the encounter! If they're lucky enough to escape afterwards, they can regrow lost legs over time.

How much wood would a Wood Duck chuck, if a Wood Duck could chuck wood?

by Iona Mitchell, Coordinator [Gardens for Wildlife](#) and Land for Wildlife, Department of Primary Industries and Water. [Visit GFW Facebook](#).

Leatherwood trees (*Eucryphia lucida*) are in glorious flower at the moment in Tasmania and are producing lots of sweet nectar. Leatherwoods can produce masses of distinct white flowers quite visible from a distance.



Some wonderfully sweet honey is helped along by these lovely Leatherwood flowers. The flowers have four rounded petals each of which are about 2 cm in diameter with numerous prominent stamens the tips of which are laden with pollen, which changes to a burgundy colour as the flower matures. Photo: [Dracophylla \(flickr\)](#).

Leatherwood flowers are sweetly scented and can fill the air with their perfume, especially on warm days in dense stands of Leatherwood trees.

During the flowering season from January to April, beekeepers put numerous beehives in areas readily accessible by road and near dense stands of flowering Leatherwoods. Some beekeepers even go deep into the forest to place their hives near these flowering trees.

Bees encouraged to collect nectar mainly from Leatherwoods in Tasmania produce a special, famous and gourmet type of honey called Leatherwood Honey. 70% of Tasmania's honey comes from Leatherwoods, which gives it a unique and very distinctive flavour and perfume.

Leatherwoods are only found in Tasmania and grow around 6 to 10 m high, through they sometimes shoot up to 30 m high in really great conditions. They are usually found in moist rainforests with rich soils and low fire frequency in the western and southern regions of Tasmania.

The older the Leatherwood tree, the more flowers it produces. And so the older the Leatherwood, the more nectar it makes for bees to collect and turn into honey.



Pink flowering varieties of Leatherwoods also exist. Photo: [Rotuli \(flickr\)](#).

Leatherwood trees under 75 years old have few to no flowers, while trees that are 175 to 210 years old produce the most flowers. So if you see a big Leatherwood tree in full bloom, you know that it has to be a very old tree.

Leatherwoods in flower also attract and feed many insects, including butterflies, and honeyeater birds. And of course, people love to feast their eyes (and noses) on its gorgeous blossoms and lovely scent. This is a tree that just keeps on giving!

TIP

If you live in Tasmania and want to grow your own Leatherwood, it grows easily from seed and likes a partly shaded position, protected from the hot sun and kept moist. They don't like wet feet though.

DID YOU KNOW

The Leatherwood was almost chosen as Tasmania's floral emblem, but it was beaten out by the Blue Gum as it was not a plant readily grown in Tasmanian gardens because of its huge size!

Spot your Buddies on Facebook!

See more images of the Buddies from this month's B-mail on the [Backyard Buddies Facebook Page](#)

Be friends with your Buddy toys on Facebook too! Enter photo comps on the Facebook page for your chance to win some great prizes, like a Backyard Buddy toy, a field guide to wildlife or an Organic Essence products.

You've got to be in it to win it!

In the Big Backyard - Frogs of the Macquarie Marshes

The presence of a booming frog population indicates that an environment is healthy. Frogs are also an important food source for many animals such as birds, fish, lizards and snakes.

The Ramsar listed Macquarie Marshes wetlands is home to at least 15 species of frogs - more than any other wetland in NSW. Frogs that have been spotted here include the Waterholding Frog, Barking Frog, Salmon Striped Frog, Painted Burrowing Frog, Holy Cross Frog, Striped Burrowing Frog, Green Tree Frog, Broad Palmed Rocketfrog, Peron's Tree Frog, Desert Tree Frog, many kinds of native toadlets and more! This area is an extremely important frog habitat.

The Foundation is currently funding PhD research into the frogs of the Macquarie Marshes to significantly improve knowledge about frogs and their requirements for a happy, healthy community. The recommendations from this research will provide precise measurements of which vegetation frogs prefer to breed in and where they survive dry periods.

This project aims to help restore natural ecosystem function and make appropriate recommendations about environmental water flooding, duration of flooding, and frequency of flooding to restore and maintain a healthy habitat for frogs and the other animals of the Macquarie Marshes.

You can play a part in this project and protect and conserve our amazing native species and their habitats. Donate



The Crucifix Toad or Holy Cross Frog has amazing colours and a cross pattern on its back. This fantastically coloured species is just one of over 15 found at the Ramsar listed Macquarie Marshes. Photo: [Eyeweed \(flickr\)](#).

today and help save Australia's threatened species before it's too late.

[Donate online](#) or by calling 02 9221 1949. All donations over \$2 are tax-deductible and we will send you a receipt.

Every donation, no matter how much, helps make a big difference to saving threatened species.



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Donate your Old Mobile Phones

Did you know that Australians buy new mobile phones at the rate of 3-4 million phones per year? There is an estimated 10-18 million unused phones lying around in home cupboards and office desks that sadly are destined to become landfill.

The Foundation and the Aussie Recycling Program have partnered up to help stop millions of unwanted mobile phones with their highly toxic metals from going to landfill and polluting our environment. By donating your old mobile phone you will be helping the environment. The Aussie Recycling Program is giving the Foundation between \$3-5 for mobile phones you donate.

Donating your phone is simple: purchase a padded jiffy bag and stick on a completed [Reply Paid Postage Label](#).

