

TAWNY FROGMOUTH *Podargus strigoides* ... Marian Weaving
Illustrations ... Kaye Traynor



Tawny Frogmouth

One of the inevitable consequences of a growing human population is changes to the natural landscape. The loss of a large tree in a backyard or parkland and clearing of small pockets of native remnant vegetation can have flow-on effects to our native wildlife.

In the field of urban ecology, research shows that wildlife species respond to urbanisation in a range of ways, but can be classified by their responses into three broad categories. 'Urban adaptors' are those animals that learn to adapt to changes associated with human occupation. 'Urban avoiders' are species that disappear entirely because some specific habitat requirement is no longer available in the landscape and 'Urban exploiters' are species that have learnt to exploit the changes brought about by urbanisation to their advantage growing so numerous as to be almost considered a pest species.

Recent investigations of one of Australia's unique nocturnal birds, the Tawny Frogmouth, suggests that the species is well equipped to be classified as an 'urban-adapted' species. There are several reasons why they have achieved this status, and why they occupy suburbs and city environments in high numbers compared to more forested environments.

A major factor is their lack of reliance on tree hollows and cavities for breeding and daytime roosting. Large hollow-bearing trees have become very scarce in urban areas due to perceived risks to people and clearing for housing development. Frogmouths are not reliant on specialist prey and will consume many types of invertebrates as well as frogs and mice. Gardens, parklands and bushland remnants provide a year-round food supply. While Tawny Frogmouths show considerable flexibility in their use of the urban landscape, studies highlight a reliance on areas containing trees (particularly eucalyptus species) used for roosting and breeding.

They reproduce successfully and will sometimes double-brood if the first attempt fails. Breeding season is from July to January; high fledging and low failure rates contribute to their successful occupation of the urban environment. While currently it appears to be relatively good news for the Tawny Frogmouth, urbanisation is having detrimental effects on many other native wildlife species. Even for such urban-adapted species there is a tipping point where urbanisation becomes so intensive that many other species become locally extinct. The benefits derived from living in 'green suburbs' and having regular contact with nature is undisputed by scientific evidence worldwide. Making our suburbs wildlife friendly is possible. It does however require the commitment, imagination and willingness of municipal planners, developers, community groups and residents working together to make it happen. I prefer to be optimistic and believe that the Tawny Frogmouth and other equally wonderful Australian species will be occupying our suburbs and surrounds in greater numbers in the coming decades.

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