

Microbats and Your Garden

Overview

Microbats are small insect-eating mammals. They are seldom noticed in Bayside, despite being widespread.

Bayside is home to more than 7 different species of microbat. Each has its preferred food, and its own way of hunting for that food. For example, some fly above the trees snatching small insects as they fly overhead. Other species regularly fly low to the ground, sometimes even landing to snatch a juicy grasshopper or cricket.

The smallest common local species, the Little Forest Bat, is around 5cm long and weighs less than 4g.

Microbats are important for controlling the numbers of annoying insects. For example, a single tiny Little Forest Bat can eat 1,000 mosquitoes in one night.

Shelter

Microbats require a safe location to sleep during the day and during winter. Somewhere safe from predators, and not too cold.

Large old trees with hollows and loose bark are preferred roosts for many of our local microbats. In urban areas suitable roosts are difficult to find, and their absence is believed to be a key threat to microbat numbers in Bayside.

You can help by installing a bat box or two in your garden. A single sensibly-placed bat box can provide safety for dozens of microbats.

Friends of Native Wildlife Inc. can help you source a bat box. Alternatively, there are many good designs on the Internet you can build yourself. Just make sure you get one designed for Australian bats. Naturally, exercise care with your choice of materials, ensuring you don't use any treated or toxic parts.

When placing your new bat box, think about weather and safety. A sheltered location that gets some sun, not directly lit by artificial light, seems to be popular with the bats. Don't put your box somewhere in easy reach of cats.

Your box can be attached to a building or a tree, though when attaching to a tree remember to choose an attachment method that won't harm the growing plant.

Be prepared to wait a few years for your box to become an old part of the environment before the microbats become comfortable with their new home. While humans think of new as being nice, for wildlife new often means danger.

Some of our local microbats, such as the Lesser Long-eared Bat, often roost closer to the ground. Loose piles of bricks and rocks can help provide them with provide shelter.

Food

Planting and managing your garden to promote healthy numbers of non-annoying insects will help provide food for both microbats and other insect eaters. Here are some ways you can achieve this:

- plant a range of indigenous plants, including grasses and creepers
- allow leaf litter to build up, particularly in out-of-the-way areas
- provide branches, logs, rocks and similar natural hiding places on the ground
- avoid pesticides

Threats in Bayside

The biggest threats to microbats in Bayside are

- Lack of natural roosts

help by:

- maintaining old trees and providing bat boxes

- Cats

Cats have been filmed sitting on branches swatting microbats as they fly past.

Microbats that feed near the ground are particularly vulnerable to cats. It's possible that's why these species are recorded in lower numbers in Bayside.

help by:

- keeping cats indoors, especially at night
- placing bat boxes where cats are unable to reach the bats as they come and go

- Pesticides

Microbats can be poisoned by eating insects that have been in contact with pesticides.

help by:

- avoid use of pesticides in the garden

Further Information

<https://www.bayfonw.org.au/g4ws/microbats>