

URBAN ANIMALS

Many animals live in our cities and suburbs but aren't companion animals. They include pigeons, rats, galahs, lizards, flying foxes and possums and we need to think about how we interact with them.

Policy

The Animal Justice Party (AJP) recognises the inherent value of liminal animals and their right to continue living in our towns and cities. We reject violence as a form of population control and promote a new relationship with our non-human neighbours based on respect and kindness. The best outcomes are achieved when we learn about animals' needs.

Key Objectives

1. Replace lethal population control methods currently used by city councils with humane methods centred on deterrence, care, contraception and relocation - whichever are most appropriate to a specific population.
2. Implement city council schemes that reduce human food waste and eliminate unintentional or unhealthy food sources for animals.
3. Educate residents on the needs of liminal animals to promote positive human-animal interactions and deter unwanted or detrimental interactions. Liminal animals are a valuable educational link between urban areas and nature.
4. Promote urban biodiversity and healthy, inter-species competition by planting native flora and re-establishing local ecosystems.
5. Introduce city council design and building standards that cater for the needs of liminal animals while preventing human animal conflict (for example, integrated nesting/housing where appropriate).
6. Structure our cities and transport systems to cause minimum impact to resident animals (see our Wildlife Rescue policy).
7. Regrow greenbelts between human settlements and wildlife habitat and cease urban sprawl which forces surviving wildlife into urban areas (see also our Land Clearing policy).
8. Legalise and fund the rescue, rehabilitation and release of injured liminal animals regardless of species.
9. Amend any legislation and policy which fails to consider the differences between urban and other populations of species, including their unique needs and impacts.
10. Reduce the impact of human noise and light on liminal animals, which will depend on the source and local environment.

Background

When thinking about animals and their interests, humans tend to classify animals as either living under our care (*domesticated animals*) or living out in nature, free from human control (*wild animals*). However, there are millions of animals who share our cities and suburbs with us, living side-by-side with their human neighbours, and yet do not wish to socialise with us. These animals have been classified as *liminal animals*¹ - neither wild nor domesticated. Liminal animals are poorly understood and have unique interests that must be recognised by human society.

Liminal animals include all animals who live within our urban boundaries. They include the brush turkey wandering the suburbs, the city pigeons nesting on a rooftop, the bees who pollinate our flowers, and many more. Australians have daily interactions with liminal animals, either to our delight or sometimes (for some) disgust. Either way, these animals have adapted their behaviour to thrive, or at least survive, in a human-shaped environment and we are responsible for their presence.

It has been suggested that there are three types of liminal animals². Those who were previously domesticated but are now free-living thanks to our neglect (e.g. urban cat colonies), those who have lived within human societies for hundreds of years and are truly liminal (e.g. rats), and lastly, wild animals who are now forced to live among us because we have encroached upon their natural habitat or who choose to live in urban areas to utilise the available resources (e.g. crows/ravens).

¹https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1478-9302.12100_11

²<https://kibokonakipepeo.wordpress.com/2013/05/19/on-the-origin-of-liminal-species/>

In many Australian suburbs we may catch glimpses of possums as they crawl along fence lines and across telephone wires. Of course, the possum was here long before urban development, but has since learned to adapt to our suburbs by using our structures as makeshift homes and highways. Another highly visible example of a previously wild liminal animal is the Australian White Ibis, who became more prevalent in urban centres towards the end of the 20th century as their native marsh habitats were developed or dried up.

Recognising liminal animals as residents

We tend to demonise liminal animals by classifying them as pests to be poisoned, shot and destroyed. This is because they compete with us for space and resources. Consider how many people find new routes around town to avoid swooping magpies! However, if we take a more proactive and non-violent perspective on managing our relationship with animals, then we may all be better for it.

For example, despite the lucrative business in killing pigeons these animals still live in our urban centres in large numbers and are often in poor health due to their population size in a harsh environment with suboptimal food supplies. Overpopulation leads to welfare problems and disease. Attempts to cull populations have minimal impact, with populations making a full recovery and even increasing within weeks. Long-term reductions are best achieved³ by modifying the human built environment to discourage nesting and by supplying pigeons with healthy food with contraceptives. The biggest challenge⁴ in this method is overcoming the human desire for an instant solution. By accepting pigeons as residents of the city and learning their behaviours, we are able to live comfortably side-by-side.

Liminal animals are also individuals and residents of our towns and cities. Their presence can bring joy and wonder into an otherwise dreary urban environment. Having these animals close to our homes connects us with the non-human world and teaches us to respect those who are different to us. Indeed, for humans living in densely populated urban areas, liminal animals are often the best way to connect with, and learn about, wildlife.

Amazingly, urban environments actually host many unique types of animals and plants. Due to the different conditions in cities compared to other ecosystems, *liminal animals and plants have begun to evolve in divergent ways*⁵. This is demonstrated by the *white footed mouse*⁶ in New York City parks and

the discovery of a new daisy species called the *York groundsel*⁷, whose habitat consists of car parks, pavement cracks, and other disturbed ground in urban areas. These examples clearly show that urban environments can offer many unique opportunities for nature, but we still need to do more to share our cities with liminal animals.

To better learn to cohabit in cities, towns and suburbs, we also need to understand and consider the impacts of human activities and environmental changes on liminal animals.

Liminal animals and the night

Some mammalian liminal animals are becoming nocturnal⁸ in response to increased human populations and activity in order to avoid contact with humans. While this may, in the short-term, be beneficial to individual animals⁹, it also has the potential to disturb predator-prey dynamics¹⁰ that have evolved over generations. Scientists warn that this may lead to unknown and potentially cascading effects¹¹ on the species' fitness, population persistence, community interactions and evolution.

Naturally nocturnal animals are also impacted by human adaptations to the environment, such as the abundance of artificial light that brightens the streets, roads and community spaces. Sea turtle hatchlings¹², for example, rely on the reflection of the moon and stars to orient to the ocean, a reflection which can be disrupted by artificial light from buildings and walkways. Instead of heading toward waves sparkling with moonlight, the turtles are often drawn toward brightly lit roads and parking lots, where they quickly die. Some bird species, who also use the stars to navigate¹³, can become disoriented by artificial lights, colliding with buildings and becoming vulnerable to traffic, predation, starvation or dehydration¹⁴. Artificial light also interferes with the vision, foraging and movement activities of many mammals¹⁵.

Most worryingly for the health of ecosystems is the decline of insect populations. One only needs to leave a porch light on to witness the flight-to-light behaviour exhibited by some species of insects. Artificial light has been found to¹⁶ disrupt insects' temporal patterns, interfere with their spatial orientation, act as a fatal attraction, reduce their visual sensitivity, and alter foraging activity and species interactions, as well as preventing movement between habitat patches. Experts have cautioned that when populations of such abundant organisms are disrupted, entire communities will be affected¹⁷. The growth and flowering of trees and plants are also impacted,

³<https://www.intechopen.com/online-first/ecology-of-feral-pigeons-population-monitoring-resource-selection-and-management-practices>

⁴<https://cloudfront.escholarship.org/dist/prd/content/qt7sd4220v/qt7sd4220v.pdf>

⁵https://science.sciencemag.org/content/358/6363/eaam8327.abstract?casa_token=uAfHEbsJaN4AAAAA:a-UNGNTRZP7peixmE_Y6NDjXWQG4faBO9ryHwW8orHS3twa_b43qZr3EgGn4KoGUBzcmQM6Tu23-oTM

⁶<https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rsbl.2015.0983>

⁷<https://web.archive.org/web/20070927221840/http://www.watsonia.org.uk/Vol24p375.pdf>

⁸<https://ourenvironment.berkeley.edu/people/kaitlyn-gaynor>

⁹<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/06/animals-are-becoming-nocturnal-to-avoid-interacting-with-humans>

¹⁰<https://phys.org/news/2018-06-animals-shifting-day-night-people.html>

¹¹<https://science.sciencemag.org/content/360/6394/1232>

¹²<http://www.publish.csiro.au/zo/ZO13028>

¹³https://www.nps.gov/articles/nocturnal_earthnight.htm

¹⁴<https://phys.org/news/2018-03-pollution-animal-behaviour.html>

¹⁵https://www.nps.gov/articles/nocturnal_earthnight.htm

¹⁶<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/ece3.4557>

¹⁷<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2018.05.078>

¹⁸https://www.nps.gov/articles/nocturnal_earthnight.htm

in turn impacting the insects and animals dependent on them for food¹⁸.

Scientist Christopher Kyba¹⁹ explains that "the introduction of artificial light probably represents the most drastic change human beings have made to their environment." But perhaps not all artificial light is created equally. Other experts caution

that it may be the shift from LPS lamps to white LED lights that is magnifying the problem²⁰. They argue that this shift represents an ecological experiment on a global scale, with potentially devastating results. They call for the development of new lighting technology that balances the need for public safety, energy efficiency and conservation, which can be used on public, commercial and private lands.

¹⁹<https://www.darksky.org/light-pollution/wildlife/>

²⁰<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/ece3.4557>



Want a voice for animals in Parliament? Join, donate, or find out more about the Animal Justice Party at animaljusticeparty.org. You can also read our policies, here: animaljusticeparty.org/policieslist.

Authorised by: Geoff Russell, 6 Fifth Ave, St Morris SA 5068