

## Man v bird: the brush turkey battle

By News Online's Sarah Collerton

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**Not only do they dart across the road when you least expect it, they wreak absolute chaos on gardens.**

Brush turkeys have already spread like cane toads across south-east Queensland and now have marched en masse into Sydney's North Shore.

A leading expert says this is because the 70-centimetre long bourgeois bird has high-class tastes.

Griffith urban ecologist Darryl Jones, who has been studying the bird since 1983, says he has found a strong correlation between wealthy suburbs and the spread of the brush turkey, stemming from the fact that they flourish in leafy environments.

"Rich people get brush turkeys basically, and lucky they can afford to do something to about it," he told ABC News Online.

"The fashion changed from having an absolutely overly manicured English garden, with three rosebeds and a hedge, to having bushy sorts of gardens, which has enticed them.

"If you've spent a lot of money on a beautiful garden and people really like neatness and order, then the brush turkey is a source of chaos."

But Professor Jones says 20 years ago this wasn't the case.

"They weren't endangered or anything, but they were extremely rare," he said.

"They were just really hammered by people hunting them; like people would eat them during the depression. They survived in pick pockets but because of the hunting pressure they were one of the shyest birds."

But Professor Jones says laws brought in to protect the brush turkey, also commonly known as bush and scrub turkeys, have caused a dramatic recovery of their population.

"There's no question the population is expanding all the time," he said.

"They turn up in the most ridiculous of places and because they are remarkably adaptable. They use any material they can get to make a mound."

Professor Jones says they also are expanding because people move them and feed them by mistake.

"In the old days, people would've just wrung their necks," he said.



*Professor Jones says once a male brush turkey has decided where his mound will go, it's there to stay. (ABC News: Giulio Saggin)*

• [Map: Brisbane 4000](#)

"But now people don't do that. They catch them - they're tame and easy to catch - grab them, stick them in a box in the car and drop them off in the nearest bit of bush.

"Often people will drop them in places they can't survive, so they will just go to the nearest backyard and build a mound there from whatever material they can find.

And Professor Jones says be careful, because they might be eating Fido's food.

"We also now know that lots of brush turkeys actually take advantage of people's pets," he said.

"Lots of people stagger outside before they've had their morning coffee and throw a tin of cat food down on the ground and go back inside and lots of brush turkeys chase away the pets and eat the food themselves."

He says with female brush turkeys laying 20 to 30 eggs a year, the population is sure to continue thriving, even though mysteriously, no-one looks after the chicks.

"These are very unusual animals. Basically, the eggs get laid into the bottom of a combust heap, they dig their way to the surface and simply no-one looks after them - absolutely no parental care," he said.

"There's no parents to teach them what a cat looks like or what food is, or anything.

"It's still a big mystery how do they do this. They grow really fast, but they're still extremely vulnerable - there's lots and lots of cats in the forest."

## Here to stay

Professor Jones says once a pesky male brush turkey has decided his mound, his nest which he uses to attract females, is going in your backyard, it's all downhill from there.

"It's just about impossible to get rid of the guy," he said.

"He has decided that's where he's going to put his precious mound, which is the most important thing in his world, and nothing will dissuade him.

"It happens all the time. People say 'I'm sick to death of that bloody bird', so they spend back-breaking hours spreading it all back out again.

"Next morning they wake from their exhausted sleep to find it all back in place.

"It's like the turkey is saying 'look I've made a big decision about where my mound is going and look buddy this is it, I'm staying'."

## Loss prevention

But don't despair - there are few things you can do to fight off the bothersome creature.

Apart from shelling out the big bucks for a pest control person to come and take them away, Professor Jones says best way to deter them is to make it really hard for them to rake.

"They spend all day everyday raking the ground with the big feet of theirs, so what you can do in places that are vulnerable, is put down chicken wire," he said.

"They absolutely hate that because everytime they put their foot down it gets caught in that wire. So it looks horrible for a while but after a week or so, the birds abandon the whole thing and move on."

And he says it's very important not to have exposed compost heap and most importantly, don't let them get started.

"Lots of people make the mistake of finding it fascinating for a while and then they realise the mess and think 'Oh my God, it's wrecking my garden,' but it's too late at that stage," he said.

"In a lot of cases, the males will take over someone's garden compost heap because half the work's already been done for them."

And Professor Jones believes we have to embrace brush turkeys, because these birds are not going anywhere.

"Even if we tried to get rid of all the ones we could, there's just so many to replace them," he said.

"It's like climate change - we have to adapt to their presence, rather than mitigate against them."

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