

<http://www.smh.com.au/environment/first-it-was-the-march-of-the-cane-toad-x2026-now-the-brush-turkey-is-eating-sydney-20091101-hrku.html>

First it was the march of the cane toad ... now the brush turkey is eating Sydney

John Huxley – The Sydney Morning Herald

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Big beastie ... the brush turkey has been making inroads into north shore gardens. The inexorable advance south, right. *Photo: Orlando Chiodo*

THEY'RE big, noisy, powerful and quite capable of blitzing the average Aussie backyard to bits in an afternoon. And, they're coming to a Sydney suburb near you soon - if they aren't there already.

Like the introduced cane toad, the native brush, or scrub, turkey has been migrating south for a decade, making messy inroads into the north shore. It seems unstoppable.

Experts predict that the hefty bird, once considered rare south of the Hawkesbury River, can be expected to turn up in the Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain in the next couple of years. "Sydney doesn't know what it's in for," says Alan Morris, records officer for Birding NSW, who has witnessed the invasion from his home on the Central Coast.

"If you like big birds and can laugh them off, you're OK. But if, say, you're a 68-year-old pensioner who has spent ages growing prize chrysanthemums, they can be an absolute pain."

Brush turkeys used to be common in NSW. They were wiped out in Sydney by the loss of habitat and by hunters, for whom their tough, stringy meat provided a family meal during the Depression.

They also virtually disappeared from the Illawarra, though recent sightings suggest they are coming back there, too.

Mr Morris attributes the return of the birds, commonly found in rainforests and scrub, primarily to the attractions of big gardens and blocks, increasingly planted with native bushes.

Not only are the birds protected, they have few predators and are sufficiently adaptable and audacious to flourish in backyards, where the presence of cats and dogs may even provide them with a supply of pet food.

The invasion of the killer turkeys, which build mounds, has been on foot and by air, into which the grunting, flapping birds launch themselves from trees. But Mr Morris suspects they have also been assisted by humans.

"People round here, I know, trap the birds - probably using possum traps - and take them over the [Mooney Mooney] bridge before releasing them." From there, it is a short walk or flap into the northern suburbs.

The brush turkey is one of several big birds making inroads into Sydney. Others include the crested pigeon, the long-billed corella and the black-tailed native hen, recently spotted at Sydney Olympic Park.

Koel and channel-billed cuckoos are also becoming more common, again probably because the switch to native, bush gardens has attracted increasing numbers of their "host" wattle birds.

Unfortunately, they have further displaced many small birds that used to bring colour and song. But Winifred Chevalier says they should be enjoyed.

She was delighted when a brush turkey visited her North Sydney garden last month. "It was lovely. Though I admit that when I saw it I was in two minds - sort of, absolutely fabulous, but .." The bird stayed only briefly before strutting off. Southwards.