

# Living with Brush Turkeys

By Steven Head, Willoughby City Council

More and more people in Willoughby are catching sight of one of our more remarkable-looking residents. Brush-turkeys are big birds - up to 75 cm long - and are usually seen walking around. They don't fly very well, but can flutter into trees where they roost at night.



Brush-turkeys don't use nests. Males build a mound and tend it with care to keep the eggs buried within at a constant temperature. After the chicks hatch they have to fend for themselves.

In the wild the Brush-turkey has a reputation for being shy of people, but can become quite sociable in an urban setting. Over the past few years they have been spreading around Willoughby and have been seen in the east

around Middle Harbour and as far west as Blue Gum Reserve and Mowbray Park. At least one has been seen frequently around Artarmon. It seems to like going to the shops and the library. A male has been seen enthusiastically building a mound in Artarmon Reserve so a happy event might eventuate in the near future.

While the brush-turkey can be common in areas of good habitat, its numbers have declined dramatically in many areas. Few make it to adulthood. Natural predators such as snakes, foxes, domestic cats and dogs, and in-ground swimming pools all make life hard for young turkeys.

Brush-turkeys are a protected species and quite fascinating. Some people like them and allow them to share their yards, but at times their foraging can become annoying to gardeners. Plants can be protected by laying a mulch of river gravel around them or by using tree guards. Don't feed brush-turkeys! Let them find their own food.

If a male starts building a mound where you don't want it, you could try pegging a tarp or heavy plastic over it. This usually sends them elsewhere. Don't try to destroy a mound or chase a brush-turkey away. This will have no effect. The male brush-turkey's drive to build a mound is irrepresible and second only to feeding.

Please enjoy these old residents who are trying to move back into the area and help keep them safe by controlling your cats and dogs. If you need more advice on brush-turkeys you can contact Council's Wildlife Officer, by ringing 9777 1000. ■

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