



Birds on Farms - friends or foe

Birds can be a major pest on some crops as any fruit and grape grower will tell you.

Flocks of silver-eyes for example are well known pests of grape growers in the south west of WA.

There are many bird species that pose no threat to crops and may actually feed on insect pests. Birds that feed exclusively on animal matter or insects will generally not harm a valuable fruit crop.

Examples of birds from the south west of WA that feed predominantly on insects include a variety of robins, golden whistlers and wrens.

Habitat is also important and it is possible to develop bird refuges in areas of the farm that are not easily cultivated.

Native vegetation with plenty of trees and low ground cover will encourage bird life.

The good news is it also possible to be selective in the type of birds you attract. For example, with good site and native plant selection it is possible to establish habitats for pest-controlling birds, such as robins and wrens rather than encouraging your more common pest species such as silver-eyes or twenty-eight parrots.

Farmers in the USA using beneficial native birds to manage insect populations have found that these 'friendly' birds may also defend their territory from avian pests.

The *Farmer to Farmer* magazine reported fruit growers who practiced biological control with native birds also never experienced sustained serious bird damage on their farms.

California scientists have found that beneficial bird numbers and diversity is greater in organic farms versus conventional farms in the same region.

In Western Australia, the biggest problem in using native birds is protecting them from foxes and feral cats. Regular fox and feral cat control programs should be undertaken and keeping vegetation low will also make it difficult for foxes and cats to stalk their prey.

This information is of a general nature - seek specific advice for your situation.

OFS Farm Inputs

- Improve your soil and reduce your reliance on synthetic fertilisers
- Improve moisture and nutrient retention in the short term
- Provide medium term benefits of improved quality and reduced incidence of pest and disease

