



NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION®
People and Nature: Our Future is in the Balance

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Making a Home for Homeless Wildlife in Aftermath of California Fires

The recent fires have left many concerned citizens in Southern California wondering what they can do to help displaced wildlife searching for new suitable habitat. In most cases, it's best to leave nature to its own devices since plants and animals are more resilient and resourceful than most people think. However there are a few things homeowners can do to make their landscape wildlife-friendly during this time of exceptional stress, and a few things they should avoid doing.

Experts at the National Wildlife Federation recommend you:

- **Provide clean water sources on your property.** Make water available in shallow containers-- tubs, dishes, and existing birdbaths, to assist wildlife in moving from areas of destroyed habitat to areas continuing to offer some food, water and cover. To avoid an opportunity for mosquitoes carrying West Nile Virus to breed in these shallow water areas, be vigilant and change the water supply every two days or so. You may also use "mosquito dunks" consisting of the bacterium which keeps the mosquito population at bay.
- **Make additional bird food available, such as suet, sunflower, niger and good quality mixed bird seed, fruit and nectar, in bird feeders and trays.** Clean and disinfect feeders regularly, with one part liquid chlorine household bleach in nine parts of tepid water (a 10% solution), to decrease the possibility of spreading infectious diseases among birds visiting the feeders.
- **Provide additional shelter for wildlife.** Types of shelter include birdhouses, stone walls and rock piles, log piles (placed at least 30 feet from your house) and layered native shrubs.
- **Add native plants to your landscape.** Unlike most plant species from other parts of the world, plants native to your area in Southern California best serve the needs of local wildlife. If your landscape is large enough, consider adding one or more small native trees or shrubs away from your house. Native plants provide the entire range of seasonal habitat benefits, including food, shelter, and a place to raise young.

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- **Learn more about fire-safe landscaping and integrate this with existing knowledge of local habitat and wildlife species.**
- **Assist neighbors and others whose property has been damaged by the fires with erosion control efforts.** Create temporary debris dams, dig ditches and line them with sandbags. Another option is to spray fiber-containing, weed seed-free mulches over areas that are likely to erode. These do not seem to interfere with plant establishment and growth. Avoid reseeding; this has not been proven to prevent erosion. If seeds are to be used, they should be confirmed native plant seeds and not invasive ones, such as ryegrass.
- **Spread the word about why people should not seed and disturb areas ravaged by fires.** These activities may encourage the growth of non-native weeds, resulting in poorer habitat for wildlife species.
- **Use the U.S. Forest Service Fire Effects Information System database, at www.fs.fed.us/database/feis/ to learn more about how plant and animals species respond to fire.**
- **Participate in community meetings and other planning forums to hear expert recommendations and advocate for fire-safe, wildlife-friendly landscaping.**

Do not feed wild animals except native bird species that normally come to feeders.

Feeding may alter instinctual foraging and hunting behavior. Once wild animals come to expect food without having to forage for it, they may lose their ability to do so in the future. This behavior may be imprinted or “learned” and consequently could affect future generations of wildlife species and their distributions. Human and pet food is of little nutritional value to wild animals. The interaction between wild animals, people, and their pets can be potentially dangerous to all concerned so leave wildlife to their own devices to find food and water.

Learn more about making your yard wildlife-friendly with the National Wildlife Federation’s Backyard Wildlife Habitat program at www.nwf.org/backyardwildlifehabitat.

The nation’s largest member-supported conservation education and advocacy group, the National Wildlife Federation unites people from all walks of life to protect nature, wildlife and the world we all share. The Federation has educated and inspired families to uphold America’s conservation tradition since 1936.

