

# Biodiversity

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*"The majority of economists have never been taught that ecosystems provide humanity with an absolutely indispensable array of services..."*

Professor Paul Ehrlich,  
Scientist and writer

Biodiversity - the variety of all living things on Earth - is all around us and looking after us. Even in cities biodiversity is still an integral part of life. We may not see it but biodiversity helps keep our water drinkable, our air breathable, our soils fertile for growing food, and our seas clean.

We used to think of plants and animals as just "out there somewhere", something to inspire us and renew our spirits on the occasional bushwalk or drive through the country. But we are now realising that we rely on biodiversity in every part of our lives:

- Our food and medicines come from biodiversity.
- Native birds, bats and insects pollinate our gardens.
- We breathe the oxygen produced by trees.
- Trees take up the carbon dioxide produced by our factories.
- Plants keep the air fresh in our offices.
- Tiny bugs break down our garbage into fertile soil.
- Our crops are protected from pests by foraging birds and insects.
- Marine organisms clean up the sewage we put into the oceans.



# We live in it

## Biodiversity cleans up Australia

Some ecosystems, such as wetlands, actually remove pollution from dirty water. As the water plants grow, they extract nutrients and heavy metals from sewage and produce oxygen for other living things to breathe. New housing estates have established artificial wetlands to break down sewage rather than discharging it to the sea.

Biodiversity also acts as a free, natural water purifier. For example, forests do a great job of trapping silt and keep salty water well below ground level. The high cost of building water purification plants has led some catchment planners to conclude that forests are more valuable left standing in catchments than sold off as timber.

## People making a difference

Extensive clearing in the Broughton Catchment, 180km north of Adelaide, has left a legacy of spreading salinity and soil erosion. Local water quality has suffered. Greening Australia together with the clothing company Esprit de Corps and local farmers created rural-urban links to establish a plant nursery. Here local wattles and other natives are grown for replanting in the catchment. Early results suggest that revegetation of the denuded catchment with 7,500 plants has reduced soil loss, slowed salinisation and increased habitat and biodiversity in the area.

**Greening Australia**  
[www.greeningaustralia.org.au](http://www.greeningaustralia.org.au)

