

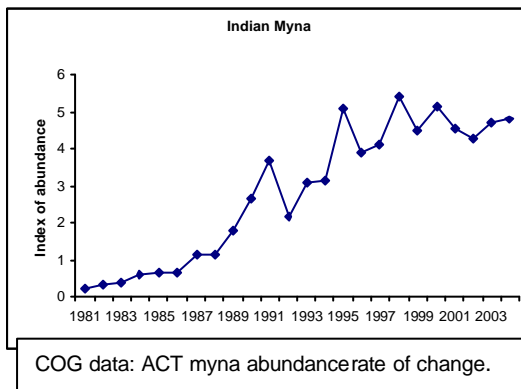
## Restoring Some Balance — Tackling Indian Mynas

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to National Wildlife Rehabilitation Conference July 2208

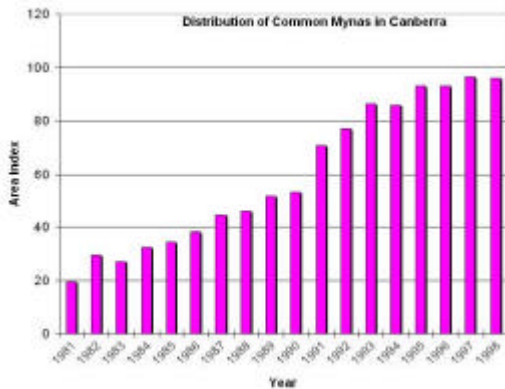


Photo: Mark David

The Indian - or Common - Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*) is a highly invasive introduced bird that is now having a serious impact on Australia's wildlife. Brought to Australia in the 1860s to reduce insect pests in Melbourne market gardens, it has now spread across all of the eastern seaboard, and extends inland as far as Dubbo. Deliberately brought to Canberra in the 1960s—a century later—it is now estimated by ANU research and from COG Garden Bird Survey data at 250 birds per km<sup>2</sup>: posing a 150,000 threat to our local native wildlife.



Highly aggressive, territorial, and an omnivorous scavenger it out-competes many of our native hollow-nesting birds and small arboreal mammals for nesting hollows, preys on eggs and young of native animals, and is a voracious predator of endemic insects.



Its threat to Australia's birdlife was identified in ANU research in the 1990s, and this has been borne out by ongoing observations and reports. It is included by the IUCN (The World Conservation Union) on its list of 100 most invasive species, and the international experience with this bird has been dire. It is identified as a contributor to the demise or decline of the Mangaia Kingfisher (Cook Is), the extinct Red-moustached Fruit Dove (French Polynesia), the extremely rare Seychelles Magpie Robin (Seychelles), Echo Parakeet (Mauritius), Cave Swiftlets (French Polynesia), the Long-billed reed warbler (Tahiti), the critically endangered Tahitian Monarch as well as others.



In Australia, its behaviour is a particular threat to a number of rare, vulnerable, and endangered species. A serious concern is held for a number of endemic insects and small lizards that are also struggling because of the drought and poor land-use / land management practices. These include the Golden Sun Moth (*Synemon plana*), the Perunga Flightless Grasshopper (*Perunga ochracea*), the Coorooboorama Raspy Cricket, and the Grassland Earless Dragon (*Tympanocryptis pinguicollis*). Indian Myna competition for nesting hollows, their habit of blockading nearby hollows to eliminate competition from native birds, and their preying

on eggs and chicks is also a threat to a number of iconic native birds: the Eastern Rosella, the Superb Parrot—which is starting to breed in the ACT—and the Crimson Rosella. It is uncertain whether other hollow-nesting birds could be affected, but mynas have been observed evicting and taking over nesting hollows used by Galahs and Kookaburras.

A big reason for the public's dislike of mynas is the fact that their presence in backyards leads to a sharp decline in small native birds frequently gardens: superb fairy wrens, silver-eyes, spinebills, pardalottes. Their raucous calls and fouling of patios also don't lead to public acceptance.

Because of their commensal nature—mynas being a bird at ease in living with humans—they pose some human health threat. They are heavily infected with bird mites and their droppings and faeces dust can cause a range of human health problems. Their scavenging around outdoor cafes, shopping centres and schools and their nesting in roofs of houses provide an opportunity for transmission of disease to humans.

Tackling the spread of Indian Mynas is an integral part of protecting Australia's wildlife and restoring some balance back to highly impacted regions. It is "rehabilitation of our wildlife" in a wider sense.

This then is an objective of the Canberra Indian Myna Action Group Inc. Formed in April 2006, CIMAG, now comprising just on 500 members, has the aim of protecting our native wildlife from the threat posed by the Indian Myna, and of reducing the social amenity nuisance of these birds.

To this end, the Group has a detailed strategy which has three prime elements:

- raising public awareness that these birds are a serious environmental threat, not just a backyard nuisance
- providing information to the community and businesses on how to reduce myna numbers and spread by reducing their feeding, breeding and roosting opportunities
- undertaking a humane trapping program.

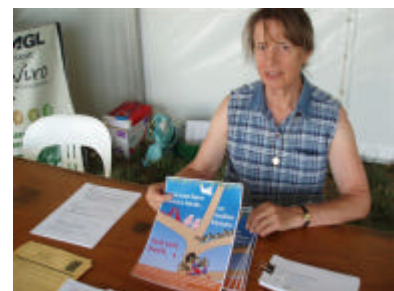
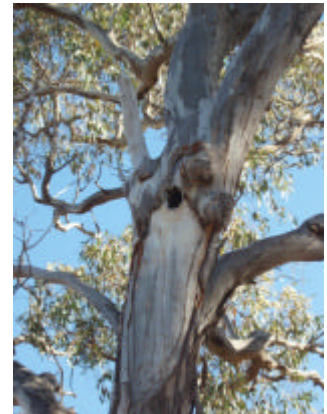
The trapping program is the success story of CIMAG and demonstrates that widespread community-action can have a significant impact on a targeted pest species.

With compact, easy to operate traps, and operating in accordance with an RSPCA-agreed Protocol on Animal Welfare, CIMAG members have removed at least 18,200 mynas from Canberra backyards in the two years of CIMAG operation. As a number of members do not report their monthly captures; the trap is easy to make and copy by people who aren't CIMAG members; and there are people with commercially purchased traps, the actual number of mynas removed is known to be much higher — perhaps in the order of 25,000. As only a few people had traps in the first six months of operation, the removal rate is likely to be in the order of 10,000 – 12,000 per year.



This would correspond to removing perhaps 15 – 20 per cent of the myna population in the two years of operation. A very high proportion of the captures in January- March are juvenile: the next year's breeding populations.

Where people have been trapping, they report a profound change. Small birds are back in people's gardens; galahs and rosellas are back in tree-hollows and nesting boxes; there is no mess or fouling of patios; and there is finally



peace from the raucous myna territorial, mating and roosting calls.

A significant indicator of success comes from the COG Garden Bird Survey data: the 2007 data indicates that Indian Myna numbers across Canberra actually fell last year for the very first time. This is put down to the concerted trapping program by CIMAG members.

The success of the community-action program has been recognized by the federal and territory governments with funding assistance provided late last year to help CIMAG's public education program and to acquire materials for trap building.

A backyard trapping program is shown by experience to have an effect at the local backyard scale. A landscape scale impact requires a concerted, concentrated, coordinated, and sustained program of action at the household, government and business level: across private and public lands. Much can be done by businesses in this regard: for example better waste management at cafes, restaurants and shopping centres will deprive mynas of an easy feed. Similarly, households can manage pet food and landholders can better manage stock feed. These are all currently easy pickings for mynas and provide the protein base for higher populations.

Research by Dr Tidemann of ANU on a roosting tree trap will provide a quantum leap in Indian Myna control activities across Australia. It will enable large scale removal of roosting birds in a single event, and could be employed in public spaces, especially in nature reserves where trapping is not currently undertaken. The two scale activities complement each other, and would be further enhanced by community and business activity to reduce feeding, breeding and roosting



opportunities of mynas.

In pursuit of its broad objectives, CIMAG provides assistance to scientific research being undertaken at ANU that will, *inter alia*, inform the Group of the impacts of its activities on myna populations and any subsequent positive impacts this is having on native birds. The anecdotal evidence is there, but a scientific assessment through monitoring and project work would provide a sounder evidentiary base. Scientific research will also assist the Group refine its strategies and redirect efforts as appropriate. At CIMAG's suggestion and encouragement, the ANU and the CRC for Invasive Animals is funding a 4 year PhD research project on Indian Mynas (funding support is also to be provided by the Canberra Ornithologists Group and Birds Australia). This will be valuable follow-up research to that previously undertaken by Dr Tidemann and his students at ANU.

The Canberra community-action approach and trapping success is also seen by other communities and local councils as an appropriate model to adopt in addressing the problems of mynas in their environments. The Indian Myna problem is not just an issue of the Canberra region, but a problem

that our wildlife faces across eastern Australia. Accordingly, an aspect of the CIMAG program is to provide assistance to other groups that wish to establish similar community-action groups.

#### Summary

Tackling the invasion of Indian Mynas is a necessary part of maintaining our natural environment and rehabilitating wildlife from the effects of human-induced change: a number of native birds, small arboreal mammals and endemic insects are at risk from this introduced pest. Community-action can have a significant impact at the local level, and this needs to be complemented by action at a broader landscape scale from government, business and landholders. To do nothing is to consign our native wildlife to a further serious threat. Canberra and Australia would not be the same if the Indian Myna was the main bird heard and seen in our gardens, in our reserves and across our landscape.

Rehabilitation of our wildlife also means restoring some balance from the threat posed by this bird.