

Garden wildlife: Hornsby Shire's Bowerbirds

Our local bowerbirds

Bowerbirds are close relatives of the birds of paradise. Mainly occurring in forests, they live in a particular local area throughout their lives. Two bowerbird species live in the Hornsby Shire, Satin Bowerbirds and Green Catbirds.



The male Satin Bowerbird

What about breeding?

The male [Satin Bowerbird](#) prances and struts around the bower during courtship. He offers the female items from his collection of blue objects and makes hissing, chattering and scolding noises. Mating takes place in the bower, and the male can mate with several females in a single season. The female builds a shallow saucer shaped nest of twigs and dry leaves, placed 10-15 m above the ground in the upright outer branches of a tree. She lays and sits on one to three eggs, and raises the young on her own.

[Green Catbirds](#) do not build bowers, but may clear an area and lay leaves down in it. It is thought that they mate for life. In courtship the male chases the female from branch to branch making clicking and rasping sounds. He may hold coloured leaves or fruit in his beak while displaying. Only the female green catbird builds the nest and incubates the eggs, although both sexes feed the young. They defend the nest by feigning injury, dropping to the forest floor and fluttering around pretending they have broken wings.

Why are they called bowerbirds?

Male Satin Bowerbirds weave elaborate bowers out of twigs and decorations. Hence bowerbirds are thought of as the most advanced of all birds. Whilst a bower isn't a nest, it is an attractive 'avenue', for male bowerbirds to allure a female. When they are not feeding, males spend much of their time perched in the bower, calling to potential mates and warning off potential rivals.

What do satin bowerbirds look like?

Both male and female Satin Bowerbirds have bright lilac-blue eyes, but are very different. The mature male Satin Bowerbird is about 30 centimetres long, and his plumage is black with a glossy purple-blue sheen. Until he moults into this plumage during his seventh year, his plumage resembles that of the female. The female is slightly smaller, and is coloured with green, grey-green, dusky brown and dark brown. Her belly is buff to cream, marked with dark olive-grey to dusky grey crescents.

How do they decorate their bowers?

The male Satin Bowerbird's bower is an avenue of twigs and sticks, woven into walls running in a north-south direction. The walls are often painted with a mixture of charcoal and saliva. Platforms at both ends of the avenue are decorated with mainly blue-coloured objects – including flowers, feathers, and berries. When there are humans nearby, the birds will also use plastic items such as clothes pegs.

What environments do they live in?

The Satin Bowerbird lives in rainforests and the edges of drier forests. During autumn and winter, Satin Bowerbirds leave their forest habitat and move into open woodlands to forage for fruit, leaves and insects. However, with the arrival of the spring breeding season they collect together in small groups, inhabiting territories which they apparently occupy year after year. Each mature male bird protects and tends his own bower throughout the year.

What does the Green Catbird look and sound like?

The Green Catbird gets its name from its cat-like wailing call. Males and females are various shades of green, flecked with black on the head and face, and white on the nape, neck and wing tips. Their eyes are red.

Where do they live?

Green Catbirds live in the tropical and subtropical rainforests and adjacent tall forests along the east coast and adjacent ranges. Green catbirds are mainly fruit eaters, but they will also eat insects and their larvae. Occasionally they will extend their diet to leaves, shoots and flower heads, frogs, and baby birds.