The changing role of arborists

Caring for trees and the creatures that rely on them is becoming one and the same.

WITH **PIA FINNIGAN**,
MARKETING MANAGER AT ARBWEST

Arborists have always been custodians of trees, but the role is changing. Our roles are about more than pruning, managing risk or removing trees; they are also about creating habitat for wildlife.

For arborists, habitat creation is also an opportunity to expand the services they offer, from retaining habitat trees and creating artificial hollows to repurposing logs and installing nesting boxes. Arborists can provide clients with alternatives that deliver environmental value while creating an additional income stream.

Owner of Hayes Tree Care and ArbWest committee member Nick Hayes is one of many arborists who now offer habitat creation as a service.

"For me, flora and fauna are connected. You can't really talk about protecting wildlife without talking about protecting and managing the trees and vegetation they rely on," he said.

"As arborists, we're in a unique position. We see the hollows, nests, bees, birds, and other wildlife that are using them, and we're also involved in making decisions about what stays and what goes.

"Artificial hollows aren't a replacement for naturally occurring habitat. Retaining existing habitat should always come first. But where that's not possible, we now have techniques available that allow us to put some of that habitat value back."

Hayes sees habitat creation as a natural extension of the work the business already does. Before pruning or removing trees, the team looks at what can be retained or recreated as habitats.



Carnaby's black-cockatoos are endangered. Image: Dean Arthurell

Hayes Tree Care uses chainsaws and a specialist tool called a Hollowhog to create hollows for birds and other tree-dwellers.

"I would say demand for habitat creation is definitely increasing. We're seeing a much greater understanding from local government, businesses and the community around biodiversity and the importance of retaining mature trees," Hayes said.

"If we remove a mature hollow-bearing tree today, we could potentially be removing habitat that takes another 100 years to naturally replace. We've also deliberately built relationships with the people dealing with the wildlife side of that equation. Hayes Tree Care is a Gold Sponsor of Mandurah Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre, and we provide support to River Wren Rescue, including providing hollow logs for habitat.

"Those relationships are important to us because arborists and wildlife carers are essentially working at different ends of the same problem."

Corridors For Carnaby's

One project demonstrating the important connection between trees and wildlife is Corridors For Carnaby's.

The population of Carnaby's black-cockatoos has more than halved since the 1970s due to farming and development reducing habitat and food sources. The program is designed to help save these iconic birds from extinction by engaging with the community to create the largest restoration corridor in Western Australia.

The planting of 200,000 native Banksia trees will form a "corridor" across a 10-kilometre stretch of land near Mandurah, providing critical habitat. Artificial hollows for breeding are being installed on mature trees on private properties within about one kilometre of the food corridor.

Carnaby's Crusaders is one of the partners in the Corridors For Carnaby's program, with Founder and Director Dean Arthurell contributing to the project.

"This project is exactly what I'm about. It's an all-encompassing project, looking at both the lack of habitat and providing the birds with a long-term, sustainable food source," he said.

"The Banksia corridor will support the current breeding population, support them to use the habitat that's already there, and support them long into the future."

Arthurell's role is to identify locations that are suitable for installing artificial habitats and nesting hollows. The Corridors For Carnaby's team has already installed five hollows and is now monitoring them with cameras. Eventually, 50 hollows will be installed across the restoration corridor.



Tim Stuart of Coastline Mowers. Image: ArbWest

"We installed them on a Friday and by Saturday we had birds at all five of the hollows," Arthurell said. "That tells you something. It means they really need them."

The team is now doing school visits to help children learn more about conservation and to help them understand why projects like this are so important. Arthurell said there is plenty that arborists can do right now to help in projects like Corridors For Carnaby's.

"I'd like to see more arborists looking at how some of the natural resources that come out of tree work could be recycled and used for projects like this," he said.

"For the hollows, we need natural hardwood chip, and it's actually very difficult to get hold of. I'm always trying to find an arborist who has hardwood chip that could be donated."

As interest in habitat creation grows, so too are the tools available to arborists wanting to add it to their services.

Tim Stuart from ArbWest partner Coastline Mowers is now offering the ArboGrub, after discovering the tool while investigating habitat creation and its potential within arboriculture.

"When I was at the last Arbwest Conference I spoke with one of the other arborist businesses there, and they mentioned getting into providing habitat creations as part of their offerings," he said.

"After researching what is involved, I started asking around before I discovered the ArboGrub." AA

Scan to vist the Corridors for Carnaby's website corridorsforcarnabys.com