

Hollows are homes for wildlife

EARTH FIRST

by Peter West, ECCO

Last weeks article on preventing wood smoke pollution also raised the important issue of where to obtain fire wood in a responsible way.

Dead trees and fallen timber make popular firewood because they are seasoned and dry, however many firewood users are unaware of the ecological implications of collecting dead trees and fallen logs.

Dead trees and fallen timber often contain hollows and are relied on by a wide variety of native animals. Millions of tonnes of timber is harvested for firewood in Australia each year, and it is now recognised that removal of dead standing and fallen trees is contributing to the loss of our native iconic wildlife.

Tree hollows can take decades to form and support a wide range of species including sugar gliders, possums, owls, many birds, tree frogs and gecko's, and insect-eating bats.

In NSW alone, the species reliant on tree hollows and nests include 46 mammals, 81 birds, 31 reptiles, and 16 frogs. Native animals also have to compete for hollows with exotic species, such as European bees, common starlings, and common myna's.

Although some hollows may appear dis-used, they may be relied on by migrating species such as the Superb Parrot – that fly through and nest in Orange in colonies each year. Many native animals also use more than one hollow throughout the year.

In NSW, loss of hollow-bearing trees and removal of dead wood are identified as key threatening processes to species conservation. By removing hollows, you can unintentionally rob a native animal of shelter or a site for nesting.

In agricultural landscapes, woodland habitat is often already fragmented, and hollow-bearing trees are even more important for species survival.

How to choose wood wisely

- Only purchase firewood from a certified firewood supplier to ensure the timber hasn't been illegally obtained
- Refuse fire wood that contains hollows, and ask for a mixed load to avoid over harvesting of any one species.
- Use plantation timber instead of our dwindling native forests or woodlands
- If collecting firewood yourself, avoid trees and limbs containing holes and hollows, and avoid species such as Yellow Box, Red Box, White Box, Iron Back, and River Red Gum as they are threatened communities
- Leave some dead wood and fallen timber behind to provide homes for wildlife and shelter for stock
- Recycle – use old fence posts, off-cuts or ask you local arborist for tree's that have already been cut down
- Use seasoned wood only – unseasoned wood will not burn well and you will

- need more of it to produce the same heat
- If you own land, plant trees for your future needs and replace habitat for native animals

If you burn firewood, you also release carbon into the atmosphere. Consider planting trees to offset your carbon emissions and replace habitat for our native fauna. Don't burn the homes of native animals to warm yours.

For more information

- <http://www.firewood.asn.au/licensees.php>
- <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/determinations/LossOfHollowTreesKtp.htm>
- <http://www.npansw.org.au/web/conservation/firewood/firewood.pdf>

Next events for the calendar

Next weeks article will be on creating a biodiversity oasis by planting trees.
World Environment Day – June 5.