

Common Name/*Scientific name* **Australian Brush Turkey (*Alectura lathami*)**



**Description:** The Australian Brush-turkey is a large bird (body length is 600–750mm and a wingspan about 850mm) with mainly black body plumage, bare red head, yellow throat wattle (pale blue in further northern birds) and an unusual vertical tail.

**Feeding & Behaviour in the gardens:** Brush turkeys feed on insects, seeds, and fallen fruits, which are exposed by raking the leaf litter or breaking open rotten timber with their large feet. The majority of food is obtained from the ground, with birds occasionally observed feeding on ripening fruits among tree branches. They are somewhat of a pest in the gardens in that they often rake mulch off garden beds searching for food or males use it building their mound nest, littering it across paths and lawn areas while doing so. They are mostly seen on the ground but will fly short distances to avoid predators or to roost on low tree branches at night.

**Nesting:** They build large nests on the ground made of leaves, other compostable material, and earth, 1 to 1.5 metres high and up to 4m across. Mound-building is done by a dominant male, and visited by a succession of local females, for mating and egg-laying. The male works tirelessly, raking leaf litter, thin sticks and other plant material from all around, and also diligently repelling rival males, which are keen to usurp his position. The effort involved eventually wears him down, and he will ultimately be defeated by a new king. The eggs are very large (90 × 45 mm), and the young are fully fledged on hatching. They can fly within hours, as soon as the feathers are dry. The eggs are hatched by the heat of the composting mound, the temperature of which is regulated by his adding or removing material to maintain the temperature in the 33–35 °C incubation temperature range. The chicks are totally independent at hatching.

**Where seen in the gardens:** Brush Turkeys live in moist forests so are found in most treed areas of the lower gardens and will wander into open areas and garden beds during the day. There are many nesting mounds throughout the gardens, but not all are used each year. An easily accessible mound is located near the gardens border fence in the Whipbird Walk, and another just south of the Mossy Log area.

**Similar Species in the gardens:** It is not easily confused with any other South East Queensland bird.