

# **Vegetation structure on overpasses is critical in overcoming the road barrier effect for small birds**

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Although overpasses are a widely used structure for facilitating safe fauna crossings, most focus has been on mammal species, both small and large. Very little attention has been paid to the road barrier effect on birds, presumably because many species readily fly over even large road systems. However, it is becoming increasingly clear that for smaller species, even relatively small roads with moderate levels of traffic can be significant or complete barriers to movement. In Australia, we have been intensively investigating fauna crossings on the Compton Road Land-bridge, an hour-glass shaped structure spanning a busy four-lane highway. Although a wide range of mammal, amphibian and reptile species began using the structure within weeks of completion, small birds avoided the overpass for several years. Movements of passerines began to be noticed once the dense plantings had reached about 2-3m in height. Since then, movement of even edge-avoiding species has been regular with a total of 23 species being recorded within the vegetation; most of these species were never detected crossing the road away from the structure.