

Oxford Australia Word of the Month

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Flying Cane Toad – *noun* a myna (alluding to the destructive habits of this introduced bird).

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Betty Hew

Marketing Coordinator
General Division

Phone:
(03) 9934 9131

Email:
betty.hew@oup.com



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Flying Cane Toad

The story behind the Word of the Month

The *myna* (or *mynah* or *Indian myna*) is the bird *Acridotheres tristis*, of South-East Asia, that has become naturalised in Australia. The name is sometimes confused with *miner*, used of a number of native Australian honeyeaters. The Asian bird's name comes from a Hindi word that goes back to a Sanskrit word *madana* meaning 'love', referring to the affectionate behaviour of pairs of the birds. Australians' attitudes towards this bird, however, have become anything but affectionate, and mynas are generally regarded as pests, especially because they drive native birds out of their nesting spots. They are the bogans of the ornithological world.

In 1998 the *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney) reported:

A survey involving up to 20,000 volunteers from around Australia will determine if that cheeky, feathered interloper—the common mynah bird—has come to rival the cane toad as a national pest. The mynah bird's habit of snatching territory and nesting sites from native birds and small mammals in the eastern States has won it the unflattering nicknames of '**flying cane toad**' and 'garbage bird'.

In 2009 the *Chronicle* from Toowoomba showed that the term is widespread:

These birds are highly intelligent, extremely territorial, and have the dubious distinction of being named one of the world's top 100 invasive species and the Most Hated Pest in Australia. They are known as the **flying cane toad**, and in surveys are more loathed than foxes and feral cats.

Attempts to eliminate the myna began in 2000, as reported in the *Canberra Times*:

Australian Capital Territory Urban Services Minister Brendan Smyth has launched a war against the '**flying cane toad**', the myna bird. Smyth announced on 15 May 2000 that the Australian National University Forestry Department would receive a \$A12,000 grant to assist with a new invention designed to painlessly kill whole flocks of the troublesome bird at a time by luring them into a synthetic tree, which is then covered and pumped full of a lethal gas.

In some parts of Australia the term **flying cane toad** has been occasionally applied to the starling or the sparrow, but it is now almost exclusively applied to the myna.

Pests like the cane toad are never eradicated, but at least this one has added something to the Australian word stock.

metrosexual
weapon
of mass destruction
karrack
glycaemic
burka
index
barbecue stopper
senior moment
Sudoku
hornbag
dishlicker
witlof
cyberstalking
Naltrexone
pear-shaped
yakitori
Bioterrorism