

Eucalyptus

Blue gums were introduced from Australia because of their rapid growth and the idea that they might provide a ready source of wood for construction and furniture. As it turned out, in the California climate they grow so fast that when dried, the wood cracks and has very little structural integrity. Not only is it useless for its intended purpose, but it is a serious fire risk because its oils are highly combustible. It is true that Eucalypti harbor a diverse array of wildlife. They are long-bloomed with showy flowers that produce vast quantities of nectar, so native species flock to them to forage on the high-energy food source. Unfortunately, unlike the birds that co-evolved with Eucalypti down-under and developed long bills adapted to extracting their nectar, many of the California bird species that frequent blue gums—including kinglets, warblers, and vireos—are short billed. The tree's tar-like juices stick to their bills and block their nasal passages so that it becomes difficult to breathe. Many die of asphyxiation.

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