



HUME CITY COUNCIL

Living with wildlife

MAGPIES

The Australian Magpie has one of the widest distributions within Australia of any bird, being only absent from the northern tip of Cape York Peninsula and the driest deserts of Western Australia. Magpies can be found in almost all areas where there are trees and open areas for foraging. There is only one species of Magpie, but this has three subspecies which vary slightly.

There has been an increase in Magpie numbers since European settlement, largely due to the conversion of forests and woodlands to agriculture and grazing land. Urban areas with their parks, fertilised lawns and trees also support high densities of Magpies.

Diet

Magpies feed on insects and seeds. Many of the insects they eat are dug from the top few centimetres of soil.

Problems

During breeding season (Spring and early Summer), Magpies often view people, other animals, or vehicles as a potential threat to their young, which sometimes triggers swooping. If contact is made this can cause injury. Research has shown that only a small percentage of Magpies will actually swoop (approximately 5%) and a smaller percentage again will make contact.

A majority of magpies that swoop target specific groups like cyclists or pedestrians. Others target certain individuals and ignore others.





Council's advice

- Tampering with nests, or attacking Magpies, will make the birds more aggressive in the future and may provoke a non-swooping Magpie to swoop.
- Do not remove the nest of a swooping bird. This will show the Magpie that humans are a serious threat, which can exacerbate the problem. And generally the nest will be rebuilt with a new clutch of eggs laid anyway, which will result in the nesting season being extended.
- Council advises residents to be tolerant of the problem and avoid swooping hot spots wherever possible.
- If avoidance is not possible, residents are encouraged to prepare for entering into a swoop zone (refer to DSE Top 10 Tips for avoiding swooping).
- One effective strategy to negate swooping is to take an umbrella. Holding an umbrella aloft while traveling through a swoop zone (usually within 100-150m of the nest tree) will both deter swooping and act as a shield to prevent personal injury when birds continue to swoop.
- When approaching a swoop zone on bicycle, try walking your bike through this area as the Magpie may target cyclists, seeing them as a threat and not pedestrians.
- Magpies are more likely to target individuals than groups, so children walking to school are less likely to be attacked if they are walking together.
- Magpies will also readily feed on bread, cheese, meat and other foods provided by people, but Council advises residents not to feed wildlife as it may attract large numbers of birds to the area. Research also indicates that, despite attempts by people to befriend or develop a bond with a bird, Magpies are likely to view people they are familiar with as a greater threat to their young.
- In some cases young birds that have just left the nest are 'rescued' by well-meaning residents. However this act can be viewed negatively by the parents of these birds and result in swooping in the future. Often these juvenile birds would have been led away or looked after by their parents. As such, it is best to leave young Magpies in their own environment.

For more information about living with wildlife contact Hume's Coordinator, Land and Biodiversity on 9205 2200 or visit www.hume.vic.gov.au/wildlife

