

“Swooping Magpies”

Nigel Williamson

Under my Special Wildlife Licence to trap Magpies I have 2 options

1. To relocate the male (I like to go 100 kms away)
2. Euthanise the bird
3. I don't like either of these.

Over the years I have always relocated the birds but don't believe it the perfect solution.

Magpies are territorial, so when you release a bird far away from it's territory other magpies chase the intruder away. This puts pressure on the locals and others. The other problem is when he finds an empty territory and a female. He will swoop in that new area. So the problem only gets moved to somewhere else. Once a swooper always a swooper!

The Department has always suggested to me to have the bird euthanised. A couple of years ago I started to do that. This is something that took me 28 yrs to decide. I am now only getting half the jobs I used to get. Not good for business but better for the public and not good for the Magpie.

How to protect yourself from being a target

Many methods have been developed with some success. For example, put an umbrella up, wear eyes on back of helmets, and of course, cable ties on helmets are great. My guaranteed method of stopping physical attacks is once you have been swooped or hit in the back of head, you turn around and make eye contact with the offender, and point your arm and finger at him at all times and keep pointing like you would want to shoot him. He will attack again but this time keeping his distance from you and you move back out of the area until he stops and gives up. Now you can stop pointing. I have never had physical contact to me from a bird while doing this. You have now left his attacking zone. Magpies have territorial zones, they normally attack in anywhere from 50 meters to 300 meters. But every bird is different, all depends on their bad experience with human activities at the time he was interfered with.

Human and animal interference is what causes magpies to swoop to protect their young. A recent study has shown that magpies can remember for up to two decades. Magpies will target an individual in a crowd, this I've seen hundreds of time or they target a certain type of person, red jackets, only blue hats or only kids on bikes. I have filmed them at 90 kph attacking posties on motorbikes, and have seen many holes in push bike helmets. This is all because of the bad experience it had with human activities.

The best way to stop magpies from swooping is education. So we as humans don't turn a normal bird into a swooping magpie in the first place.

Magpie Alert by Daryl Jones. This is a great book with lots of insight to the lives and behaviour of our great icon, the Magpie.

I welcome anyone to approach me directly with any questions regarding the magpies. I will only be too happy to share my experience with you.