



Rescue Service Ph: 1300 094 737

Magpies

Australian Magpies belong to the same family as Butcherbirds and Currawongs. They are found in areas which there are trees (used for shelter, nesting and roosting) and bare or grassy areas in which to feed.

Magpies forage on the ground, turning over loose material, as they search for a range of insects, worms, spiders, lizards, mice and seeds. A favourite food is the scarab beetle which does so much damage to lawns.

Magpies live in territorial groups. At the top of the social structure is the permanent territorial group, large enough to defend its territory without depleting resources. There are also marginal groups whose territories are lower in quality and may not contain enough year round food or suitable nesting or roosting trees. On the bottom rung are loose non-territorial flocks made up of immature birds, displaced adults or older birds.

Nesting Season

Nesting time is June to December. The nest are a basket of sticks and stems lined with wool, hair, grass and often bits of plastic, string and wire.

It takes about 20 days for the eggs to hatch and the young spend 4 weeks in the nest before they fledge, able only to flutter and not fly. As the juveniles get older their hunting skills improve and the adults become reluctant to feed them. It is at this time you may see the parents pecking them when they make begging calls.

Relocating Magpies

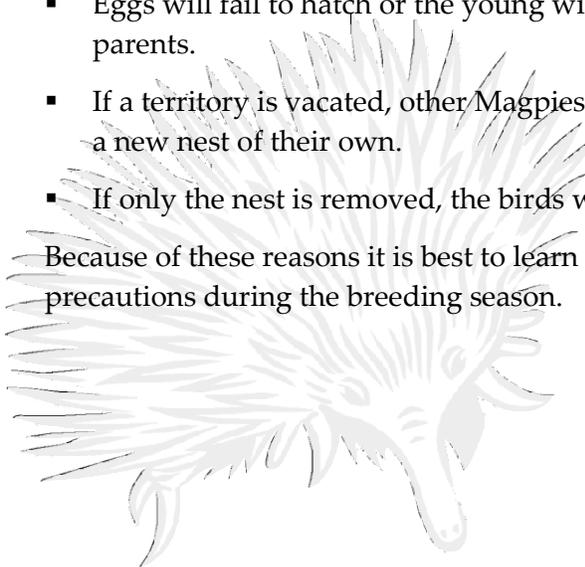
An aggressive Magpie should not be removed from the area for a number of reasons:

- Eggs will fail to hatch or the young will die of starvation and exposure without their parents.
- If a territory is vacated, other Magpies from less suitable areas will claim it and build a new nest of their own.
- If only the nest is removed, the birds will build another one in the same area.

Because of these reasons it is best to learn to live with these birds while taking suitable precautions during the breeding season.

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March 2011



Rescuing baby magpies

Baby magpies (and also most other birds) leave the nest without being able to fly properly. For the first week or so they will just be able to flutter and rely on their parents for protection and food.

Day by day their skills at flying and feeding will improve. If you see a baby magpie sitting on your lawn don't rush out and grab it. Keep cats, dogs and children away and watch carefully to see if parents are in attendance. At dusk, if no adults have come down, put the bird in a box and keep it in a quiet, safe, secluded place. If it has not been fed by the parents you can give it small pieces of meat (short-term emergencies only). In the morning put the baby in the open box back into the garden. Again watch for parents to return to it. If this action is not successful, call your local WIRES. Don't be tempted to care for it yourself because rearing alone encourages imprinting on humans and on release, the bird will be unable to relate to others and may not have the necessary skills to socialise with other Magpies or find suitable food. It will rely on people for hand-outs and may become a nuisance to people.

All juveniles rescued by WIRES are kept in a group in an aviary situation. These birds play and learn from each other. Litter is placed on the floor to encourage them to recognise wild food and develop hunting skills. These juveniles are released as a group at the same time as the wild parents are encouraging their young to leave.

Why do magpies swoop and how can I stop them?

Nesting Magpies defend their territory by swooping upon the perceived intruder. They beat their wings, clack their beaks and occasionally peck or scratch with their claws. This aggressive defence of territory lasts for the time when eggs and young are in the nest. There are a number of measures that can be taken to protect people and deter further swoops:

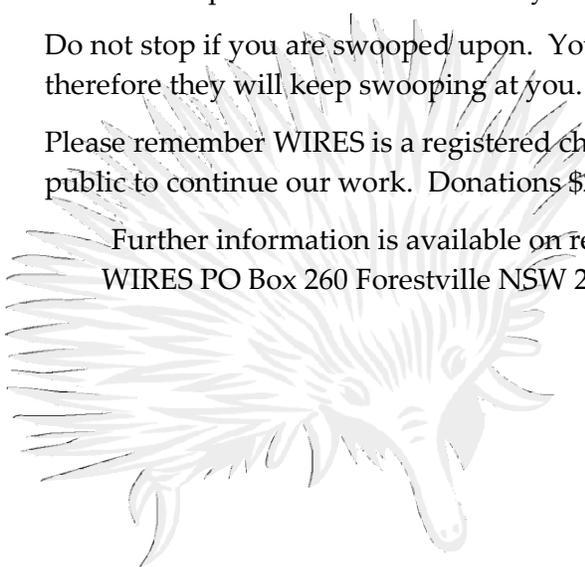
Try to avoid the area where the magpies are swooping and make a temporary sign to inform other people.

- Wear a hat while in the area.
- The best protection of all is to carry an open umbrella.

Do not stop if you are swooped upon. You are still in the magpie's territory and therefore they will keep swooping at you. Walk quickly until you are out of the area.

Please remember WIRES is a registered charity and relies upon the generosity of the public to continue our work. Donations \$2 and over are tax deductible.

Further information is available on request from WIRES Administration Office
WIRES PO Box 260 Forestville NSW 2087 Tel: 02 8977 3333 Fax: 02 8977 3399



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