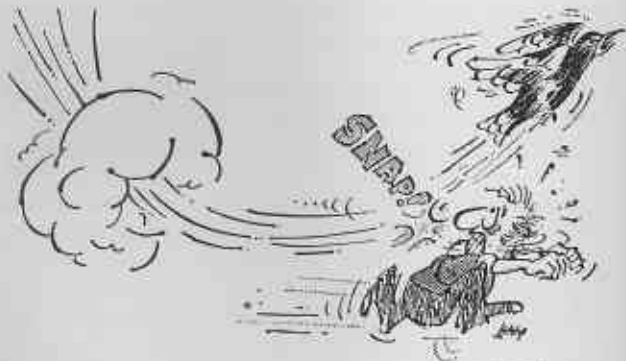


Have You Really Got a Problem With Magpies?

During spring and early summer every year the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife prepares itself for the onslaught of letters and verbal complaints over the persecution of humans by magpies.

It would appear from the relevant four-volume file in the Department's records branch that enough data has been collected on the subject to arrive at a solution to the conflict. What can be determined however is the reaction and attitudes of hundreds of W.A. people and their lack of understanding to conservation and commonsense.



Courtesy W.A. Newspapers

Life is full of "ups and downs" so the saying goes; this also means that life is full of colour and looking back as a boy, part of the heritage of an exciting existence was the annual "dive bombing" by magpies. It was never really funny at any stage and many times one would have given anything to have wrung the villain's scrawny neck—but thank goodness, commonsense prevailed and no harm came to bird or man.

During the nesting season some magpies become aggressive towards humans who move about in the birds' territories. Normally, the attacking birds are little more than a nuisance but some children become very frightened—especially if adults show alarm or exaggerated concern at the swooping birds. Either because some birds press home attacks with greater persistence, or because a child



Western Magpie (male) (*Gymnorhina dorsalis*)

looks up to see which direction the bird is attacking from, some slight facial or scalp wounds are inflicted. Some parents then become deeply concerned for the children's safety—they fear serious eye or psychological damage may be caused.

Practically all risk of injury can be eliminated if children are given a few simple instructions such as—

- Wear a broad hat or carry a sunshade or umbrella—or even wave a stick or bush above the head.
- Don't look upwards—duck the head if a swish of wings is heard.
- Don't panic—a magpie is not a big or powerful bird and can't do anyone serious harm.
- Avoid aggressive birds' territories. Parents are naturally upset and concerned about their children's safety, precisely the same instincts which drive magpies into their aggressive behaviour. Unfortunately, we can't reason with the birds—but we hope parents will react more reasonable.

Magpies are protected birds and most people don't want them or their babies destroyed. It is quite unnecessary to resort to desperate measures against such relatively harmless creatures and people are urged to calm and pacify any frightened children and protect them by the means set out above. One knows that the swooping, clicking sounds are scary but injury is easily avoided with a little commonsense, just for those 3-4 weeks in a year.

Another cause for complaint has been the beautiful, soft, midnight warblings of magpies in residential areas. If a person is at all interested in life and the beauty of nature, this bird and other night sounds are extremely relaxing. As so aptly put by the Conservator of Wildlife—"the cure lies within the complainant's attitude. If we convince ourselves that any noise is irritating, annoying or simply unbearable, we can work ourselves into a state of thwarted resentment verging on paranoia. On the other hand, if we set about it constructively we can learn to ignore, if not to love, many sorts of sounds and happenings of nature."

ELEGANT PARROT OBSERVATION

An interesting observation was made by Wildlife Officer Trevor Walley (off duty at the time).

During last winter travelling through Baldy (East of Medina) he sighted approximately 30 Elegant Parrots, feeding on the ground near the corner of St. Albans and Mundijong Roads.

Until recent years the Elegant Grass Parrot was known only in the South-West corner of the state, north to Moora and east to Merredin and near Esperance. Formerly it was not found in the jarrah forest belt or the Swan coastal plain, but since 1937 the species has been undergoing a cycle of expansion, radially in the South-West and north to the pastoral country.

Unfortunately the general public rarely realizes the significance of recognising and reporting the presence of indigenous bird species, therefore unusual movements and events by common species often go undetected.

Any sightings that may be considered irregular or strange should be passed on to government or private institutions dealing with wildlife, so that complete records can be kept for future reference.