



# Magpies



## What do magpies look like?

The Australian magpie is a medium-sized black and white bird, about 40cm long. The adult male has a white nape and rump, while females are grey in these areas and are smaller in size. The bill is grey-white and shorter in female birds. Juvenile magpies have flecked greyish dark markings and dark bills. Their lifespan is unknown, but some have lived up to 30 years.

## Where do they live?

Magpies adapt well to open, cleared environments and thrive in locations that have a combination of large tracts of lawn for foraging, scattered trees for nesting and protection, and water. They are very territorial birds, but are often found in groups of up to 20 in rural areas outside the breeding season.

## Protected species

The Australian magpie (*Gymnorhina tibicen*) is a native Australian bird and is protected under State Wildlife Legislation (Nature Conservation Act 1992) (NCA). As such, it is a serious offence to harm, take, keep or move them, unless authorised under the NCA or a Damage Mitigation Permit (DMP) is obtained for a relocation to be conducted by an authorised person or local authority. Hefty fines can be imposed on anyone found to be in contravention of the Act.


## Why protect magpies?

The Australian magpie plays an important role in natural pest management. It preys on small insects such as mosquitoes and midges. They may be beneficial to agriculture and gardens in some areas because they feed on pest insects. Long-term conservation of this species is necessary for maintaining biodiversity.

## Magpie attacks

Magpies are well known for attacks on humans during the breeding season, between July and December, and peaks in August to October. Some male magpies become a nuisance to passers-by and sometimes results in persons being struck by the bird, with some attacks of a serious nature.

Most magpies will accept the presence of people within their territories. Only a small percentage of male magpies act aggressively in the defence of their nest. This behaviour usually occurs within 100 metres of the tree containing the nest and only occurs when chicks are present, usually lasting only 6 - 8 weeks.



Research suggests that most aggressive magpies have previously had negative interaction with humans, where people have thrown stones or sticks at them, their chicks or nests.

### **Magpies on private property**

While protected wildlife is the property of the State of Queensland, the NCA provides that the State is not legally liable for an act or omission merely because protected animals are the property of the State. In this regard, landholders have a duty of care to protect the public from hazards on their land.

If the hazard is in the form of an aggressive magpie, the landholder can choose to engage a licensed private bird relocater. A contact list for your local area can be obtained by phoning the DEHP hotline on 1300 130 372. Licensed private bird relocators operate as a commercial service and usually charge a fee.

### **Reduce the chances of attack**

There are a few techniques that can be used to avoid or minimise the chance of a magpie attack, including:

- If possible, avoid areas where magpies are breeding and nesting for the duration of the breeding season. Magpies swoop to scare the intruder away from the nest, not to cause injury. Leave the area as quickly as possible and the bird should stop swooping;
- Remove unnecessary sources of water from the backyard;
- If you must enter the area, keep the bird under constant observation as it is less likely to swoop when it is being watched. Also, wear a hat or helmet or carry an umbrella;
- Do not feed magpies. Ensure no scraps of food or rubbish are left lying around;
- If you are swooped upon, do not crouch in fear, or stop. Move on quickly but don't run. Most importantly, never deliberately provoke a magpie as this usually results in greater defensive behaviour;
- Expect an elevated level of swooping activity during the breeding season, between July and December (peaking August to October). Swooping lasts about 6 - 8 weeks, while the chicks are in the nest;
- Cyclists should dismount their bikes and walk away. It is believed the birds respond mainly to movement;
- Never harass or provoke magpies as this may lead to a worse attack next time;
- Do not try and kill or cause injury to the magpies;
- Do not remove nests or eggs;
- Do not touch young birds on the ground; and
- Do not disturb the birds when there are fledglings in the nest.

### **What can Council do?**

Once notified of a problem bird on public land, Council may conduct a risk-based swooping bird assessment. Depending on the outcome of the assessment, further mitigation measures such as signage maybe implemented.

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