Swooping magpies

The Australian Magpie (Cracticus tibicen) has a breeding/nestling season from July to November. Magpies swoop intruders to defend their nest housing eggs or chicks. Intruders include dogs, cats, other birds, other Magpies, people and cyclists. They want to protect their young, not attack humans because they are 'aggressive'.

If Magpies are swooping at you we recommend to:

- Try to avoid the area as much as you can as you are in its territory (and too close to the nest). Do not stay in the area; watch the bird while walking away quietly. Eye contact will make the magpie less likely to swoop.

- Wear a hat to protect your head and glasses for your eyes. Use an umbrella or a stick above your head as magpies will swoop at the highest point.

- For cyclist: slow down, get off the bike and walk away. Speed is what has attracted the bird in the first place.

Do not:

- Harass the bird as magpies are protected by native animal laws and it may increase the swooping behaviour.

- Try to remove the Magpie from the area. It is illegal and, contrary to popular belief, it will not solve the problem. Often the bird will return within hours or the territory will be taken by another bird.

- Pick up a young bird on the ground, as it may cause its parents to start swooping you.

Some facts about Magpies:

- They are territorial (as well as pee-wees and plovers) but the swooping behaviour mostly occurs between August and November.

- It is almost always the male that does the swooping,

- The swooping is usually 100 meters around the nest tree and will last around 6 weeks,

- The swooping intensifies as the chicks grow and usually stops when they leave the nest,

- Only a small percentage of Magpies (about 10%) swoop at people.

If you are not sure what to do call Canberra Connect for advice on 13 22 81 or ACT Wildlife on 0432 300 033

For more information on birds follow the links: Canberra ornithologist group www.canberrabirds.org.au

Birds in backyards www.birdsinbackyards.net

ACT Wildlife www.actwildlife.net