



**SOUTH BURNETT**  
**REGIONAL COUNCIL**

# Living with Magpies

This factsheet provides information and advice on living with magpies in the South Burnett. **Australian Magpies are protected, as they are an Australian native species.** Each year during breeding season, nesting magpies defend their territory to protect their young.

## 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 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.

## Are magpies protected?

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.

## Do magpies always attack?

Magpies are well known for swooping attacks on humans during the breeding season, between July and December, and peaks between August and October. Some male magpies become a nuisance to the community 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 6 – 8 weeks. Research suggest that most aggressive magpies have previously had negative interaction with humans, where people, have thrown stones or sticks at them, their chicks or nests.

## What if a magpie is on private property?

While protected wildlife is the property of the State of Queensland, the *Nature Conversation Act 1992* provides 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 landholders can choose to engage a licensed private bird relocater.

A contact list for your local area can be obtained by phoning the Department of Environment & Science on 13 74 68.



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For further information contact Council's email [info@sbrc.qld.gov.au](mailto:info@sbrc.qld.gov.au) or call 1300 789 279 or 07 4189 9100.

[www.southburnett.qld.gov.au](http://www.southburnett.qld.gov.au)  southburnettregion

Licensed private bird relocators operate as a commercial service and usually charge a fee. Where an aggressive magpie is required to be relocated, the bird needs to be captured and released at least 50km away to prevent the animal from returning to its original territory. When a male is removed, a new male typically moves in within a short period of time to protect the chicks. Therefore, relocation of an aggressive male magpie may only solve the immediate problem.

### **How do I prevent an injury from a swooping magpie?**

There are a few techniques that can be used to prevent injury from a swooping magpie, including:

- wear a broad-brimmed hat and sunglasses or shelter under an umbrella to protect a person's face from swooping magpies;
- painting or sticking large 'eyes' on the back of a person's hat can also deter magpies – however has limited effectiveness for cyclists;
- attaching zip ties in the form of 'spikes' or tying strips of 'bird tape' to bike helmets;
- if a magpie swoops while a person is cycling, it may stop swooping if the person dismounts their bike and walks to remove themselves from the vicinity of the swooping magpie;
- avoid 'defence zones' by taking alternative routes during the breeding season;
- if a person must enter a 'defence zone', magpies will likely be less inclined to swoop if they are watched constantly, or if people walk in a close group;
- reporting 'defence zones' to Council so appropriate signage to warn others of the location of the nests and defence zones can be erected, particularly in areas used by vulnerable persons such as children and the elderly;
- waving sticks or umbrellas in the air or attaching a brightly coloured flag on a long pole to your bicycle can stop magpies from swooping.

### **What behaviour should I avoid?**

- it is not recommended to fight back if a magpie swoops. Throwing sticks and stones or yelling at a magpie are likely to make it more aggressive next time a person enters a defence zone;
- never approach a young magpie. Fledglings that have just left the nest or have fallen out are likely to be under a possible predator and become defensive in the future;
- parental supervision of children whilst in a known magpie swooping area is important and may prevent them from inadvertently antagonising magpies.

### **Does Council relocate swooping magpies?**

Council takes certain measures, each year, to either deter magpies or warn residents about swooping magpies. Council may investigate the removal of aggressive magpies that have caused injury or harm to people while on Council controlled land.

It is important to note that if aggressive magpies are nesting or swooping on private property, the landowner may engage a licensed bird relocator at their own expense.

### **How does Council relocate magpies?**

After collating reports of injury or harm, Council may engage a licensed bird relocator to undertake the relocation of identified magpies causing injury or harm during the nesting season.

Council will not respond/remove individual birds in the first instance and will compile a master list to ensure there are sufficient magpies requiring relocation to warrant engagement of a bird relocator.

### **How long does it take?**

Council may secure the services of a licensed bird relocator, however, will not be able to state a specific time period for removal.

Relocation will be subject to availability of a licensed bird relocator and budget allocations and other mitigating factors such as the number of reported incidents.

Whilst awaiting the services of a licensed bird relocator, Council will erect signage and provide advice to the community on how to reduce the risk of injury from swooping magpies through a general information campaign between August to October each calendar year.

### **Further Information?**

For further information about living with magpies, please contact DES on 13 74 68 or its website: [www.des.qld.gov.au](http://www.des.qld.gov.au)

To report a concern about magpies on Council controlled land you can submit a Council request on any of the following methods;

- ✉ South Burnett Regional Council  
PO Box 336  
KINGAROY QLD 4610  
(07) 4189 9100
- 📧 [info@sbrc.qld.gov.au](mailto:info@sbrc.qld.gov.au)
- 👤 Visit a Customer Service Centre