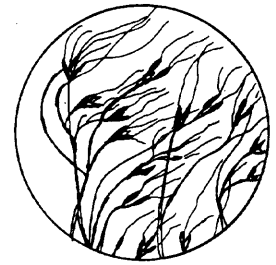


BUSH NEWS

from the Natural Areas of Kedron Brook & Environs



No 30, Spring 1996

GreenBrook Association

TURN THE TABLES - SCRUTINISE A MAGPIE

Magpie season has started! Who is there among us who does not know what that means? And yet there is, apparently, remarkably little factual and reliable information available about magpie attacks.

This is causing concern among authorities responsible for managing our wildlife. These authorities are increasingly subject to legal action over injuries caused by magpies, and yet a greater public scrutiny of their activities is limiting what they can do to prevent problems.

This article is based on a plea for assistance from Griffith University, who are working on this with the Qld Dept of Environment.

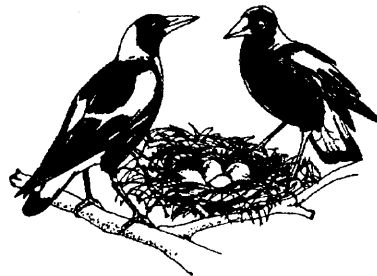
While there are no statistics available, it seems that between 30 and 40% of people actually hit during an attack receive injuries requiring attention.

The birds seem to target the head, and serious and permanent eye damage is a real possibility. Most bad injuries are caused indirectly, such as when a cyclist veers into a passing car, or an elderly person breaks a bone as she falls in fright.

What is known is that male magpies carry out most attacks, but females will attack occasionally. Magpies are naturally aggressive animals,

protecting their territories from a whole range of intruders. In fact, in New Zealand (where magpies are an introduced pest), they have been seen to attack or kill sheep, possums, hedgehogs and 17 other bird species.

One aspect which is particularly interesting is that aggressive birds seem to be confined to the suburbs. There are, apparently, no (or few) magpie attacks in the country. Because of this, it also seems to be a recent phenomena, with no reports of attacks prior to about 1950.



Nor do all birds attack. In fact, research just last year suggests that only 10-20% of suburban birds ever attack.

The attacks do not appear to correlate with population density, nor are they evenly distributed over the suburbs.

As is usually the case in situations where there is an absence of good information, theories as to 'why' and 'what to do' abound. Some say that hair colour is important.

Others contend that rapid movement, as when cycling or jogging, is involved.

Ideas for minimising attack include staying away, wearing eyes on the back of one's hat or simply staring at the bird, carrying a stick or open umbrella, or flying a flag from the back of the bike.

Another is to make the magpies friendly by feeding them, although the QNPWS has stated explicitly that this does not work.

So what can be done?

Well, Griffith University are seeking volunteers to assist in gathering factual information on the problem.

If interested, you can help at two levels. The least demanding is to request some forms on which you can record your own experiences of being attacked. The form prompts you to provide a large amount of information about each incident.

The most interesting, if you have the time, is to find a comfortable spot near an active bird, and settle in to observe and record what happens. A kit is again available to prompt you.

All enquiries to:

Dr Darryl Jones
Faculty of Environmental Sciences
Griffith University
Phone 3875 7451

DUCKBOXES

Artificial breeding hollows, or nestboxes, are normally associated with parrots and possums; possums need somewhere dark and secluded to camp during the day, and none of our local parrots breed except in hollows.

Among the other animals that will use nestboxes are many of our wild ducks, and the following information was supplied by a Victorian gentleman who is heavily involved with duckboxes.

There are, apparently, some 20000 duckboxes in place throughout Victoria. Most are positioned on posts over water.

They now have so much experience with these that their success rates are astounding. As an example, of the 122 boxes installed on Lake Borrie (near Geelong), 119 were used last season. A total of 2600 eggs were laid, fledging 1450 ducklings.

In some cases up to 3 clutches were laid by different ducks in the same box at about the same time. All would be incubated by one of the hen birds, resulting in some unusual problems.

The oldest clutch hatches first, with these ducklings leaving the box after about 3 days. The remaining eggs then go cold and bad, and are liable to explode under the next user of the box.

That the ducks queue up to use these boxes, thereby causing this problem, is yet another indication of the degree to which we are short of old trees with hollows.

Frank Box

WILDLIFE NEWS

Local sightings of the **grey goshawk** come in every year, and now their nest has been discovered on Sparkes Hill. These are noble

birds, ranging widely over a considerable territory. Breeding will keep them along the creek for the next few weeks at least.

The **flying foxes** returned to their camp on Sparkes Hill about the middle of August. Their distribution on the hill varies from year to year, and this time they are more spread out along the creek. They are not taking kindly to the presence of the goshawks.



SNAKES

Now is the breeding season for snakes, which means that they are more active, and possibly more aggressive, than usual.

If you have a problem, try contacting the QNPWS, who will relocate unwanted snakes and other reptiles. They may be contacted on 3202 0200.

MILESTONES

Consultants for:

- *Organisational Change*
- *SAP*
- *Change Management*
- *Training Design & Dev't*

Contact: Jeni Neary

Ph-3856 4772 Fax-3856 4702

WHAT IS THIS - BUSHWEEK?

Actually, yes, and it is on the last week in September. Bushweek '96 is a celebration of Brisbane's natural areas, and is being organised by the BCC.

Local celebrations, focussing on Kedron Brook, will take the form of a bushland picnic in **Grange Forest Park off Mornington St on Sunday 22nd September**. There will be good food and heaps of activities of a bushy nature. We would love to meet you.

Failing that, our next working bees are on:

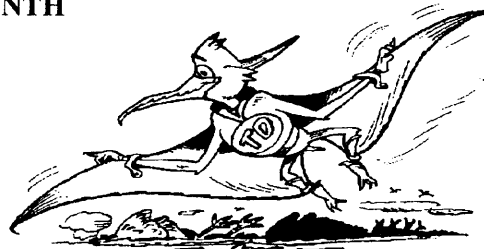
- 20 October
- 24 November

Meet at the Blandford St entrance to the park at 8.30am.

Bob Devine

PLANT OF THE MONTH

Zieria 'Carpet Star'
(*Zieria prostrata*)



This plant could also become extinct. It occurs only on a few rocky headlands in northern NSW. It is an attractive groundcover 1-1.5m across and about 100mm high, with glossy, tight leaves and fine, pink star flowers.

It is a hardy plant, being tolerant of full sun, heavy frost and drought, and essential oils in its leaves also make it insect resistant.

Available: Perrotts Nursery, Elkhorn St, Enoggera