

Local maggies starting to swoop



Coming to a park near you. Picture: Roman Joost.

IT'S that time of year when you will be walking or cycling and suddenly a black and white shadow will swoop down on you, sending you ducking for cover.

"It can be very scary getting swooped by a magpie, especially for children, but there are a lot of things you can do to avoid getting swooped, by understanding why magpies behave the way they do," Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife CEO Susanna Bradshaw said.

"It's important to remember that not all magpies swoop. Female magpies don't swoop at all as they are busy tending to their chicks and only some males do. In fact, it is estimated that only nine per cent of magpies swoop. The male magpies that do the swooping believe they are protecting their offspring," she said.

"They will only swoop for about six weeks of the year. September is usually the peak swooping month and then they will start to calm down and you can go about your business in peace again."

Ms Bradshaw said the most common targets for magpies were cyclists, young children and males, although each magpie will usually have its own target.

"These birds are very intelligent and will often approach you from behind or from the direction of the sun to try and catch you unawares," Ms Bradshaw said.

"The worst thing you can do when a magpie is swooping you is to try and fight back. Throwing rocks or sticks at a magpie will only further aggravate it and encourage it to swoop more, as it shows the magpie that you really are a threat to its babies," she said.

Magpies are a protected native species, so harming them can also lead to penalties and fines.

"Each magpie tends to have a specific person in mind to target, such as cyclists or young boys. There is method to this madness as scientists believe magpies swoop people who look like someone who bothered them in the past. All the more reason to never aggravate or attack a magpie as it will remember what you look like and attack anyone who

looks similar to you," Ms Bradshaw said.

"Some people believe that feeding magpies will help the birds lose their fear of humans and prevent swooping. Unfortunately there is no evidence to support this and instead it can artificially grow their populations, make them sick from unsuitable foods and reliant on us," she said.

"There have even been recent reports of magpies stealing food from people's hands and mouths. This is a learned behaviour caused by people feeding them. Without human interference, magpies are naturally shy."

The best thing to do is avoid locations where you know there is a magpie swooping by altering your walking or biking route for the next six weeks after a swoop.

Magpies tend to nest in the same spots each year, so remember where your local, aggressive magpie is so you can avoid him next year as well.

There are some tips you can try to deter a swooping magpie but remember that each bird is different and what works for one might not work for another.

Cyclists can try dismounting and walking past a magpie's nest.

Attaching a flag to the back of your bike which is higher than your head level can help to keep swooping magpies away from your body.

Try sticking a pair of printable eyes on the back of your helmet, although if the magpie has seen this before, it may not deter it, as they can learn the difference between real and fake eyes.

You can also fasten plastic cable ties echidna-style to your helmet to try and prevent the birds from getting at your head.



The Smiles 4 Miles library resource kit. -S

Tackling oral health in the Murrindindi Shire

ONE early childhood service and 11 family day care educators in the Murrindindi Shire received a Smiles 4 Miles award in May 2015.

The award recognised their work to improve the oral health of some of the shire's youngest community members.

Awards went to Kinglake Ranges Children's Centre and Murrindindi Family Day Care as well as educators Lynne Barkley, Jacqueline Butterworth, Lisa Denby, Ruth Halyburton, Beverly Howell, Kelley Howell, Tracey King, Yvonne Northby-Klein, Heather Rennie, Jane Thomas and Elizabeth Webb.

Smiles 4 Miles is an oral health promotion program for kindergarten-aged children developed by Dental Health Services Victoria and implemented in partnership with lower Hume Primary Care Partnership throughout the lower Hume region.

Services and educators achieve the Smiles 4 Miles award by implementing healthy eating and oral health policies, engaging with families about the importance of oral health and educating children through a variety of fun learning experiences based on the Smiles 4 Miles key message 'Drink well, Eat well and Clean well.'

Lower Hume PCP project worker Jaimie Poorter said the program is a great way to promote the benefits of healthy teeth and gums to young children.

"Good habits are formed early," Ms Poorter said.

"Children take lessons they learn at a young age with them, right up to adulthood.

"By promoting good oral health be-

haviours early in life, we can decrease the likelihood of poor oral health later in life."

In order to reach children and their families early, lower Hume PCP has held Smiles 4 Miles themed story time sessions and delivered healthy eating and oral health workshops to first mother's groups at all Murrindindi Shire Maternal and Child Health Centres.

A total of nine Smiles 4 Miles themed story time sessions were held at the Yea, Alexandra and Kinglake libraries.

Each session involved stories, songs and books that related back to the 'drink well, eat well, clean well' message.

These sessions were attended by 82 parents and educators and 128 children, who received valuable healthy eating and oral health information packs, related dental benefits and information on referral pathways to Seymour Health's Dental Clinic.

Libraries found the story time sessions to be fun and informative and parent's feedback was very positive, with a number of parents describing the sessions as "good, fun and educational."

Other parents said it was "great to see healthy messages being delivered" and that the sessions had "got (their child's) interest."

Six first mother's group healthy eating and oral health workshops also ran at Yea, Alexandra and Kinglake centres with 30 mums and their children attending.

For future sustainability lower Hume PCP has also compiled resource kits for the libraries and maternal and child health centres so they can continue to promote a healthy environment for their community members.

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