

Backyard Birds with Tanya Loos

Welcome back to nature pod. I'm William Terry. I'm the Environmental Engagement Officer at Macedon Ranges Shire Council. In this podcast, we're going to be talking to Tanya Loo's, local bird expert about some birds that you might find in your backyard. We are coming into magpie swooping season. Do you think they're a problem?

Only some Magpies are a problem. We at Birdlife Australia just had a talk given by Darryl Jones, who is an amazing Magpie expert. And he just blew so many myths out of the water, and only 10% of magpies all over Australia actually swoop. And they only swoop when there's chicks in the nest. So the second the chicks fledge, they stopped swooping. So they can be a problem. But there are things that you can do if you do have an aggressive magpie with chicks in your area?

Do you know any of good things that people could do? Yeah, the first one is, if you know that there's a Magpie with chicks in the area, and you can avoid the area for that short period of time. Just avoid the area. The other thing that you can do is if you are a cyclist, and it's the kind of magpie that attacks cyclists, you can put a mask like, he gave an example of a Trump, Donald Trump mask, but and you wear it on the back of your helmet, because the birds attack from behind, they're trying to scare you.

So they attack from behind, and they see a face behind. And then the cyclist is pedalling away, then they think, great, that's great, I'm doing my job. If you're on foot, you need to turn around and look at the bird and be like, I can see you, and you go back the way you came and just choose a different route. If you are surprised by a Magpie that's attacking you, you can pick up a stick and hold it above your head. The most important thing is to protect your head area.

Now the other thing I want to ask you about is Ravens and Crows. You know, a lot of people have difficulty identifying these and often lump them into just one category of 'Crows'. In our area we've got the Australian Raven and the Little Raven, is that correct? Yes, that's right. Yeah, they're the only two that you can get. And look, even seasoned bird watchers and bird ecologists have difficulty with the Ravens and identifying them because sometimes you can't actually see the features that you need to identify them.

So there's actually a legitimate thing on the bird data app, or when you're doing the backyard bird count that you can actually just put 'Crow' and 'Raven' species because there is no way you can tell the difference between the little raven and the Australian Raven, if you've got them in your garden, is one by the call. The Australian Raven gives that really kind of Ah, ah, really descending. Yeah, and whereas the Little Raven is like, Ah, it also stays on the same level.

I've actually got the coals here so we can compare the two Raven species just have a listen, I've got to play the Australian first up. But they sound a bit different when they're flying and sometimes they just fly past, and they're not calling at all. If you see a raven calling on the ground, and he's flicking his wings a bit as he calls, that's a Little Raven.

If you see an Australian Raven and its throat hackles, which are the feathers like a beard. If they're really long and sort of shaggy, then it's an Australian Raven. But again, it might not have its hackles apparent.

The other thing is behaviour. If you see ravens out in a paddock near you, they're going to be little ravens. If you see one Raven alone in the bush, it's probably an Australian Raven. They have different diets as well. So little Raven is mostly insects, and Australian Raven is also like a scavenger carnivore. And don't let the name Little Raven fool you, they're not very little at all. They're actually really big.

Well, I have heard that they're able to avoid cars you know, they hang around in pairs. And one of them crosses the road, and the other one says car car cars. Amazing. They are amazing. Bad joke. Sorry. I didn't mind a bad joke.

All right. Moving on to something different. Honeyeaters for the garden. Do you have honeyeaters in your garden? Honeyeaters are not all the same. So you've got your big aggressive honeyeaters, and then you've got your smaller honeyeaters. If you have a garden that's all grevilleas, big flowering plants, you're probably going to end up having Red Wattlebirds that chase away other birds.

Honeyeaters I've got in my garden include Eastern spinebills, and that's because we've planted a lot of the grevilleas that have tiny flowers and that grow low to the ground. We've also got some of the more forest honeyeaters like the White-eared Honeyeater, and we get visited by Brown-headed Honeyeaters as well.

In my area I seem to get a lot of New Holland Honeyeaters. Yes. And White plumed Honeyeaters?

Yeah Nice. See, I don't get any of those. They're more for open woodlands, and also New Holland Honeyeaters love gardens and towns. I get one New Holland Honeyeater visiting every autumn. I don't know whether it's the same one. So yeah, your Honeyeater population is very different depending on what kind of habitat you live in.

And so some plants that people can sort of plant include grevilleas and banksias. Is that right? Yes, the small ones.

And the other plants that the Eastern Spinebill will absolutely loves and that is not native are actually Salvias, the sages.

Some people claim that we've got Bell Miners, I believe it's because the calls can be quite similar to Crimson Rosella. Have you ever encountered these sort of questions?

Yes. Even my very own husband came home one day, and he'd recorded on his phone. He said, what is this call? Mind you? We'd lived here for over I think 14 years by that point. Anyway, I was delighted and I said that is the bell like call of a Crimson Rosella. They actually do sound like a bell.

For everyone at home here is the Crimson Rosella bell call and I'll play the bell miner afterwards so you can sort of see if you can tell the difference apart. Now compare this to the bell miner.

Thanks, Tanya for talking about birds with us. If anyone out there listening would like to provide some feedback, you can email us at environment@mrsc.vic.gov.au