

Teacher Notes

Themes

- Australian magpies
- Animal behaviour

Key learning outcomes

- Discover why some magpies swoop on passing people
- Learn about the life cycle of the Australian magpie
- Consider the rights of animals to live their lives naturally

Key curriculum areas

(Australian Curriculum 8.4)

- **Science:** Science Understanding; Science Inquiry Skills; Science as a Human Endeavour
- **English:** Language; Literature
- **Cross-curriculum Priority:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures
- **General Capability:** Ethics

Publication details

Swoop

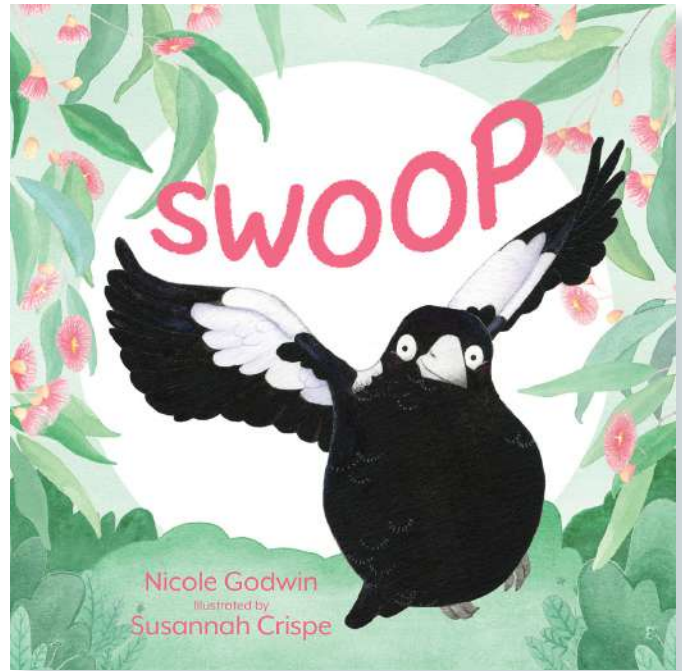
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Swoop

Nicole Godwin and Susannah Crispe

About the book

Magpie has one job, one desire, one purpose: KEEP THE EGGS SAFE.

Always on alert for danger, will Magpie's determination be enough when rock-carrying intruders arrive?

Why do magpies swoop and why do we have such a fascination with them? Discover more about these clever, cheeky and charming songbirds through this delightful book.

Recommended for

Readers aged 5 to 9 (Years 1 to 4)



PUBLISHING

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About the author and illustrator

Nicole Godwin is an award-winning children's author. She shines a light on environmental and animal rights issues and helps people think more deeply about the interconnected world around them.

Susannah Crispe is an Australian children's book and wildlife illustrator. Largely self-taught, she works primarily in watercolour and digital collage. Susannah studied Art History at the University of Sydney and Zoology at the University of New England.

Pre-reading questions or activities

Perhaps you have magpies near where you live and have seen them in your neighbourhood. What do you already know about them? Watch this clip about magpies and one of their springtime behaviours: <https://www.abc.net.au/btn/classroom/swooping-season/10524074>. Have you ever been swooped by a protective magpie? Are there any special things you do to keep yourself safe? What has worked, and what hasn't worked?

Discussion questions

Science

1. Take a minute on your own to write down three things about birds that help us to distinguish them from other creatures. Then your teacher will ask for hands up to share your thoughts.

***They have wings/they fly!** Correct. But do all birds fly? Not all do. Think about the kiwi, the penguin and the cassowary. Are there some other animals that also fly? Bats are mammals and they fly, and many insects fly, too. However, we wouldn't confuse a mosquito for a bird.*

***They have feathers.** Do all birds have feathers? Yes. And are there creatures other than birds that have feathers? No. So feathers are a sure-fire way of determining whether an animal is a bird or not.*

***They have two legs.** This is helpful, but not definitive. Can you think of any other animals that have two legs? Humans and macropods (kangaroos, wallabies, etc.) move on two legs so the thing that makes birds different is that their legs are scaly.*

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They lay eggs. This is also true of quite a few other animals, from some snake species to turtles, sharks and echidnas. However, birds' eggs are distinctive because they are hard-shelled unlike the eggs of other creatures.

Birds have a beak or bill. It also means that they have no teeth. Technically, there are a few other animals that have a beak or bill (octopus, tortoise and platypus), but again, we are not likely to mistake one of these for a bird!

2. The ability that some animals have to impersonate other creatures is called mimicry. Examples include a viper whose tail looks like a spider; a stick insect that looks remarkably like a stick; a moth whose markings act like a warning to predators. Often, the goal of mimicry and camouflage is to deceive enemies, to entice prey or to attract mates. Some adaptations don't appear to have a survival explanation, though. Take this magpie, for example, who duplicated the sound of a fire engine during the Australian bushfires in 2020: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/video/2020/jan/02/australian-magpie-mimics-emergency-siren-during-nsw-bushfires-video>. How quickly do you think this magpie learned to mimic an emergency vehicle siren?

Have you heard of magpies replicating other sounds? Listen carefully through this next clip for magpies and other birds that can be heard in the suburbs: <https://www.abc.net.au/kidslisten/noisy-by-nature/warbling-magpies/12159484>. What have the magpies learnt from their neighbours? Just as magpies copy other sounds, humans try to fool the swooping magpies by using various tricks. What are some of those efforts that humans in the book make?

Ethics

1. Why are the 'new egg thieves' different from the people who came before? What is their intent? Should animals be free to behave in ways that may harm humans but that are driven by the need to protect their young or their territory? Do you think that if the community understood why magpies swooped they would be more sympathetic to this sometimes frightening behaviour?

Activities

Science

Oology

The study of bird eggs is called oology (oh-O-lo-jee). For this activity, you will be oologists and colour in a picture of some magpie eggs. Go to the Atlas of Living Australia page where there are dozens of photos of magpie eggs: <https://bie.ala.org.au/species/urn:lsid:biodiversity.org.au:afd.taxon:4e01d6fd-18c9-4169-92ab-7e6d6d9f023f#gallery>. You can find more pictures by clicking the 'Load more images' button.

When you find a photo you like, select it and then click on 'View details of this record'. There are some tables on this page, so scroll down to the table called **Geospatial** and record where these eggs were found. You will use the **Higher geography** and **Locality** fields to collect this information. An example would be Moora, Western Australia.

Then use the worksheet on page 7 to colour in the eggs to match the ones you've chosen, and label your eggs with the place they were found. When the class results are compared, is there a pattern that reveals itself, with the colours of the eggs related to where they were laid? If so, what might be the explanation?

Life cycle

From the book and from other sources (for example, this fact sheet https://www.wildlife.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0022/91381/Australian-Magpie.pdf), create a timeline of a magpie's life. What time of year are the eggs laid? How long does the mother brood? How long do the hatched babies stay in the nest? When does swooping mostly occur? At what point do the parents force the young to leave the area?

English

Magpie antics

Magpies are very clever birds. They can recognise familiar faces, they can play, they can learn and imitate, and these behaviours have been noticed by people for a long time. Here are four old reports on some of the tricks and antics that magpies get up to.

1947 – FRIENDLY MAGPIE: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/206036708>

In the middle of last summer I visited a friend's place in Sale. It was after six o'clock and I found him watering his garden. As we began to talk we noticed a magpie on the very top of his forty-foot wireless pole, and watched it till it suddenly swooped down over us. At first we thought it was going to attack us, but it landed at our feet and looked at us as if asking for something. We pretended not to take any notice of it, and as soon as he saw this he walked over to where we were directing the hose on the garden bed. Then he walked straight under the shower of water and actually let us spray him. He did this twice and then flew away.

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1926 – THE CHEEKY MAGPIE: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/115653299>

While at work in a paddock near Grafton, a man removed his false teeth and placed them on a nearby log. Almost immediately a magpie swooped down and flew with them to a high tree. The farmer secured a gun and fired, but he was so excited that the shot missed its mark. The bird was startled and flew off with the teeth in its beak and they have not been seen since.

1905 – ATTACKED BY A MAGPIE: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/144923110>

A magpie swooped down and attacked Mr G. Ruby, of Yarram, while he was walking along the Wonwron road. The bird's bill penetrated a thick tweed cap Mr Ruby was wearing, and caused a nasty wound in the head, which bled freely.

1937 – A MISCHIEVOUS MAGPIE: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/206726914>

I have a magpie named Charlie, and he is always running away with my things. The other day my brother was cleaning his boots, and Charlie ran away with the brush he was using. There are lots of magpies about, and when Charlie was small they used to swoop down on him. Things have changed now that Charlie has grown up—the strangers just sit on the fence and watch!

What sort of texts are these? How can you tell that? What are some of the phrases and words that are unfamiliar to you, and how do you think they would be reported today? Do you think it is just and fair that a man tried to shoot a magpie? Discuss the dramas that are conveyed in these short paragraphs, such as theft, retaliation and playfulness.

Newspaper reports, non-fiction, information texts. They have short, simple sentences to convey whole stories. Unfamiliar phrases and words would include:

- secured a gun
- tweed hat
- brush (for cleaning boots)

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures

Indigenous knowledge

Here are some words for 'magpie' in Indigenous languages.

- Gurahmburuhn/gulamburan – Bundjalung language (New South Wales/Queensland)
- Kuluruku – Paakantyi language (New South Wales)
- Garru – Wiradjuri language (New South Wales)
- Kurrparu/kurparu – Diyari language (South Australia)
- Warndurla – Yindjibarndi language (Western Australia)
- Arrpwere – Eastern Arrernte language (Northern Territory)

From the language groups mentioned in the book plus the extra groups provided here, can you locate the language group that is closest to you? This map might help you: <https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/map-indigenous-australia>. Now label the picture of the magpie below with the name of that language group and that group's word(s) for 'magpie'.

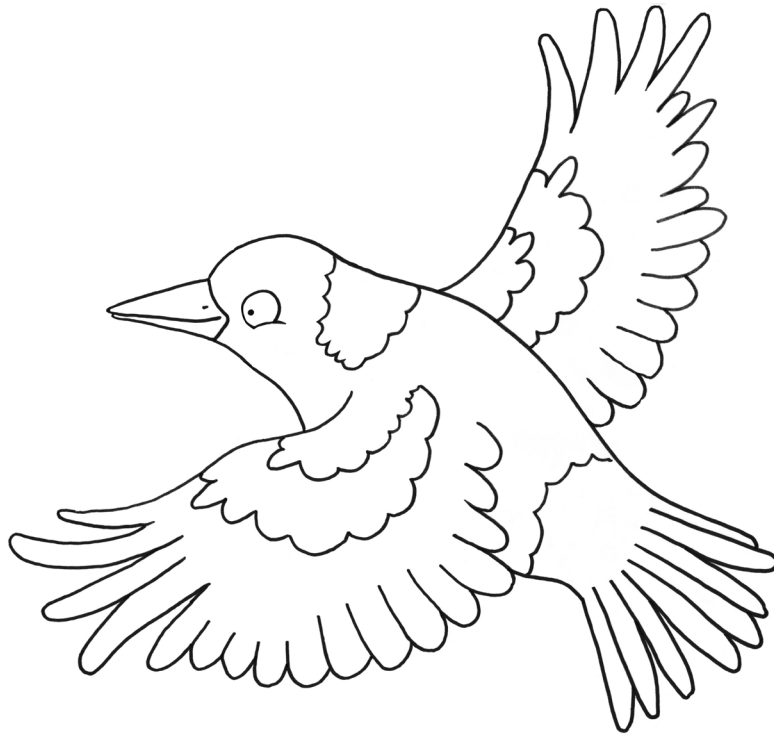


Illustration © Susannah Crispe

Worksheet: Oology

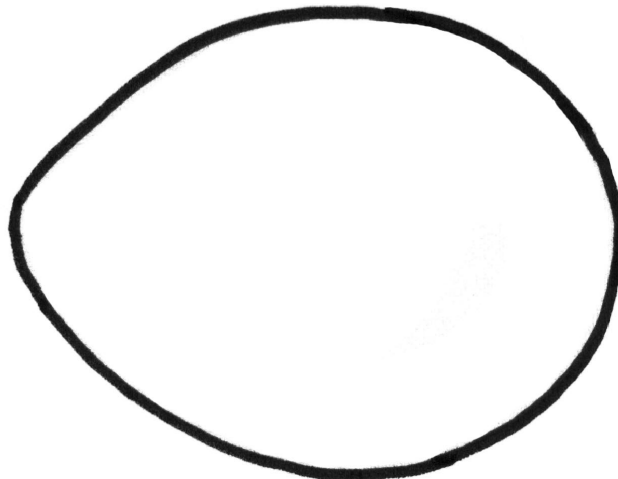
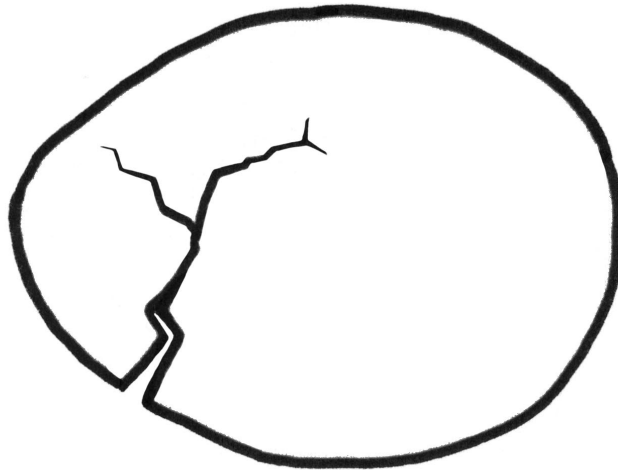


Illustration © Susannah Crispe

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Australian curriculum links

Year level	Learning area: Science	Other learning areas
Years 1/2	Science Understanding: Biological Sciences <ul style="list-style-type: none">Living things have a variety of external features (ACSSU017) Science Inquiry Skills: Evaluating <ul style="list-style-type: none">Compare observations with those of others (AC SIS041)	English: Language <ul style="list-style-type: none">Understand that different types of texts have identifiable text structures and language features that help the text serve its purpose (ACELA1463) General Capability: Ethics: Reasoning in decision making and actions <ul style="list-style-type: none">Consider consequences
Years 3/4	Science as a Human Endeavour: Nature and development of science <ul style="list-style-type: none">Science involves making predictions and describing patterns and relationships (ACSHE050) Science Inquiry Skills: Processing and analysing data and information <ul style="list-style-type: none">Compare results with predictions, suggesting possible reasons for findings (AC SIS216)	English: Literature <ul style="list-style-type: none">Draw connections between personal experiences and the worlds of texts, and share responses with others (ACELT1596)
All	Cross-curriculum Priority: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures <ul style="list-style-type: none">OI.4 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies have many language groups.	

Related books from CSIRO Publishing

For younger readers:

- *Swiftly: The Super-fast Parrot* (<https://www.publish.csiro.au/book/8062/>)
- *On the Trail of the Plains-wanderer: A Precious Australian Bird* (<https://www.publish.csiro.au/book/8005/>)

For adults:

- *Australian Magpie: Biology and Behaviour of an Unusual Songbird*, Second Edition (<https://www.publish.csiro.au/book/7677>)
- *The Compact Australian Bird Guide* (<https://www.publish.csiro.au/book/7916/>)

Other CSIRO resources

CSIRO has developed and delivered a broad range of high-quality STEM education programs and initiatives for nearly 40 years. Our programs aim to inspire the pursuit of further STEM education among students and the community, to equip the emerging workforce with tomorrow's skill sets, and to strengthen collaboration between industry and classrooms across Australia. For more information visit: <https://www.csiro.au/en/Education>