

Raptor Fact Sheet: PROTECTING CHICKENS AND CAGED BIRDS

Occasionally there are times when raptors may kill or attempt to kill domestic fowl and aviary or caged birds.

It is important to be aware that *all wildlife* in Western Australia is protected under the Wildlife Act and the Animal Welfare Act. It is illegal to shoot, trap, harm or otherwise interfere with wildlife, including raptors.

When native carnivores attempt to prey upon domestic birds, it is not done out of any “evil” or “malice” on the part of the predator but out of natural survival instinct. In the majority of cases where wild raptors attack domestic birds, the predators are either juveniles who are still learning how to be raptors, or birds which are starving through illness, injury or environmental factors.

Sometimes, though, a predator may attack because of the way they perceive domestic birds. In the eyes of a wild animal, confined domestic birds are weak and vulnerable. It is the role of the predator in nature to weed out the weak and vulnerable, ensuring the overall health and strength of the population.

Many raptor rehabilitators and enthusiasts keep other species of birds and animals as pets or have backyard chickens to produce eggs for the family. Just like everyone else, we have to deal with incursions by wild raptors. Experience has shown that the best and most effective method to deal with raptor attacks is to prevent them from occurring. There are several straightforward measures that can be put into place to protect domestic birds:

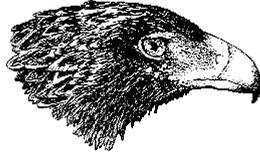
- The “Scare-Owl” – most day active birds, including raptors, ravens, butcher birds and magpies, are wary of owls. A “scare-owl” can be purchased from a garden centre and put on the roof of the aviary or chicken run. Care should be taken to ensure that the “scare-owl” is out of sight of the birds inside the enclosure or it may cause them to become frightened. The “scare-owl” should be visible from above. Predatory birds approaching the bird enclosure will see what appears to be an owl on the roof and should be deterred from attempting an attack. Move the “scare-owl” around regularly so that visiting predators don’t get used to it.
- Another use for plastic bags – plastic shopping bags can be cut up into long strips and the strips tied to the wire on the roof of an aviary or chicken run. In a breeze, they will lift and rustle, deterring wild birds from landing on the roof. Should a wild bird land on the roof it should find the footing uncertain because of the strips and an attack will be more difficult than it would otherwise have been.
- Shadecloth sails – these garden accessories are becoming cheaper and more readily available from hardware outlets and garden centres. Positioned over an aviary, they obscure an aerial predator’s line of sight and make it harder for a hunting bird to set up an attack.
- Cable ties – these can be purchased very cheaply and can be attached to the wire roof of an aviary or chicken run with the ends pointing upward like thorns. These make it problematic and uncomfortable for a bird to land on it.
- Double wire – several species of carnivorous birds (not just raptors) have been known to take small birds through single-thickness aviary wire. Putting an extra outer layer of wire around the aviary with a small gap in between layers makes it much harder for any animal to take birds.
- Shelter for free-ranging fowl – trees and shrubs can be planted out in areas where fowl are put to roam. These trees and shrubs should be pruned so that there is about 50-60 cm of room underneath the bottom branches, allowing chickens and other birds to take shelter when needed. Generally, when a raptor approaches, wild birds will sound an alarm call and the fowl will run for the nearest shelter. In open yards and paddocks, these free-ranging birds are easy targets with nowhere to hide. For a quick fix, potted shrubs or shadecloth sails can be employed until permanent plants can be established.

In cases where a juvenile raptor is attempting to hunt domestic birds or a raptor is simply making an attack of opportunity, deterrents can be extremely effective.

If the predator is starving, sick or injured and hunting domestic animals out of desperation, however, it will do anything it can to survive and it may actually be in need of help itself.

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Society for the
Preservation
of Raptors Inc.



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In a minority of cases, a raptor may develop a “bad” habit of hunting domestic birds.

In cases of desperation or habituation, deterrents may not work and it may become necessary to rehabilitate and/or relocate the bird. In these cases, you should contact the Department of Parks and Wildlife (or equivalent in States and Territories other than Western Australia) and ask to speak with a Wildlife Officer.

The Wildlife Officer may ask some questions. He or she may ask you how long the problem has been going on. You may be asked if there are any new developments in your area where land has been cleared, or whether there have been any bush fires or other natural phenomena such as extended dry periods which may have led to loss of habitat. You may be asked if the predator appears to be sick or injured.

The reason you may be asked questions is so that the Wildlife Officer can get an idea of why your domestic birds are being attacked and recommend a solution that will work for everybody.

If the Wildlife Officer believes that intervention is required to remove a predator, he or she may then be able to guide you through the process of ensuring that everything is done in accordance with the rules and regulations governing wildlife in your area. If the problem is environmental, however – eg: a major bushfire leaving native wildlife without a natural hunting ground – it may be necessary to work with your community to try and restore nature’s balance as quickly as you can. This will benefit all wildlife regardless of its position in the food chain.

Good luck in keeping your domestic birds safe and happy.

EMERGENCY PHONE NUMBERS (Western Australia only):

Perth Raptor Care (Perth).....(08) 6369 0705
Western Australian Birds of Prey Centre (Perth)..... 0438 388 383
Eagles Heritage (Margaret River).....(08) 9757 2960
Blackwood Valley Raptor Centre (Nannup).....(08) 9756 0669
Just Raptors (Geraldton)(08) 9938 1447
Pilbara Wildlife Carers Association (Karratha) 0438 924 842

DPaW Wildcare Help Line (for all wildlife, state wide).....(08) 9474 9055

DPaW Perth Office (Kensington).....(08) 9219 8000
DPaW Goldfields Regional Office (Kalgoorlie)(08) 9080 5555
DPaW Kimberley Regional Office (Kununurra)(08) 9168 4200
DPaW Midwest Regional Office (Geraldton)(08) 9921 5955
DPaW Pilbara Regional Office (Karratha)(08) 9182 2000
DPaW South Coast Regional Office (Albany)(08) 9842 4500
DPaW South West Regional Office (Bunbury)(08) 9725 4300
DPaW Warren Regional Office (Manjimup).....(08) 9771 7988
DPaW Wheatbelt Regional Office (Narrogin)(08) 9881 9222

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