

Defending the Family

People go to great lengths to protect their families. Many lock their homes to keep **intruders** out. Parents hold their children's hands when crossing busy streets. Parents check the backgrounds of their children's babysitters. Mothers and fathers do everything they can to protect their children. They are willing to spend a great deal of money and time to keep them from harm.

Many animals also protect their young. A cat will move her entire litter to a new place if she detects danger. Kangaroos will carry their young in pouches until they are old enough to care for themselves. Some animals will attack quickly if they sense that their young are threatened. It is never a good idea to **approach** female animals when their young are with them. In such a case even friendly animals may become vicious.

While it is **natural** for humans and animals to protect their young, one creature seems to carry this to the extreme. Meet the Australian magpie.

For most of the year, magpies and people get along with each other. However, during the magpie's mating season, its **personality** changes completely. Both the males and the females become attack machines. People who come too close to the nests may be in for a surprise. They can expect angry birds swooping down from above. If the people are not on guard, they may receive nasty gashes on their heads or necks. A few people have even lost an eye during such an attack.

Words you'll need to know

approach come near

intruders trespassers; uninvited guests

natural normal or to be expected

personality nature or character

ozone layer a thick layer above the Earth that screens out harmful sun rays

The next time you visit Australia during spring, you may see people wearing big hats and sunglasses. Why do you think they are wearing these things? Is it to protect themselves from the hot sun? Is it to prevent skin cancer? Perhaps it is. The sun in Australia is very hot and the **ozone layer** is very thin. However, if you ask them why they are wearing hats and glasses, you may get another reason. They may point to the sky and say, "it's to keep the magpies away."



Questions and Discussion

1. People who wear hats in Australia would be less likely to (Mark all that apply.)
 - a. be attacked by magpies.
 - b. be injured by magpies.
 - c. get skin cancer.

2. Skin cancer is a greater risk in Australia than the United States. This is true because
 - a. Australians are not as careful as Americans.
 - b. the ozone layer in Australia is very thin.
 - c. Australia is closer to the South Pole.

3. You should predict that most magpie attacks would come in the
 - a. fall.
 - b. winter.
 - c. spring.

4. Based on the article, you would predict that
 - a. all creatures would protect their young.
 - b. many creatures would protect their young.
 - c. most creatures would protect their young.
 - d. no creatures would protect their young.

To search the Web for more information, use the following key words or phrases:

Magpies

Australian birds