

## SHORT NOTE

### Magpie kills and eats a Skylark

On 24 August 1993, on a farm near Bridge Pa, Hastings, I saw a Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*) being chased, killed, and eaten by a Black-backed Magpie (*Gymnorhina tibicen tibicen*). The Skylark tried to escape by diving steeply and landing on rough ground about 10 m away. The Magpie swooped at the Skylark, which then took off and flew through a nearby eucalypt tree, with the Magpie a couple of metres behind. The Skylark headed for a car about 20 m away and landed underneath it. The Magpie landed beside the car, and the Skylark then moved under the vehicle, and flew again toward the eucalypt tree. The Magpie saw it leave and resumed the chase.

The Skylark flew into a flock of three other Skylarks and two Welcome Swallows (*Hirundo tahitica neoxena*) but still did not manage to shake the Magpie off. A few seconds later, the Skylark again landed on the ground near the car. This time the Magpie landed, ran up to the bird, picked it up in its bill and smacked it once on the ground. The Magpie then pulled feathers out of the Skylark and began to eat it. After about a minute it moved the body about 5 metres and then ate more of it. The Magpie fed for about 5 minutes before it flew away. The Magpie discarded most of the body, head, feet and wings of the lark, eating only part of the gut and most of the muscle.

I cannot find written evidence of Magpies chasing birds, killing and eating them. Clare Veltman (pers. comm.) studied Magpies for her doctorate but did not see them killing birds.

The impression I gained from this incident was that the Magpie had selected that Skylark and nothing was going to stop it from catching it.

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