

MUSINGS



LIFE'S CIRCUMSTANCES DICTATED THAT WE move from the country to the city. I sadly said goodbye to my much-loved, meandering spacious garden and to the birds that had made it their home. Wagtails and blue wrens, honeyeaters and silver-eyes, I loved them all.

We found a city house with a glimpse of the Dandenongs in the distance and not too much street noise. It had space and some garden around it, and my plan was to combat loneliness and homesickness by planning and creating a beautiful, lush garden retreat. But then came the drought and severe water restrictions.

I had bought a birdbath and kept it full with rinse water from the washing machine. I was trying to entice crimson rosellas, which I had seen from time to time in the immediate area, but without success. I did, however, manage to attract mynahs and blackbirds, which busily scratched the mulch off the borders onto the paths, a few evil-eyed crows, and many pigeons. I was not at all excited by this rather unglamorous group of feathered visitors.

Early one morning, as I lay in bed catching those last few precious moments before facing the day, I heard a lovely carolling. A magpie was on our almost-dead lawn. It had its head on one side, as it listened and watched, then swiftly with its strong beak pulled a worm out of the soil with amazing accuracy. The bird then walked to another spot. I noticed that it had a quite severe limp.

Over the next few weeks I cultivated the friendship of this magpie with the aid of small amounts of chicken mince, and gradually it learnt to trust me. My new birdbath became a source of delight for the bird, and for me, as I watched its splashings and preenings.

Time passed, and my little, limping feathered friend brought two fledglings into my garden and transferred my chicken mince into their hungry, demanding beaks as they stood close by, noisily cark-carking to be fed.

A sleek larger bird, obviously the dominant male, sometimes visited with them, but remained aloof. He occasionally assisted with feeding the young ones but was more intent on feeding himself. It was always the little limping mother who most stirred my interest. She was so maternally unselfish, and clearly losing condition but always fed her demanding, noisy family before having a snack herself.

I knew that if I still lived in the country I would not have come to appreciate the joy of watching magpies. But I had stumbled upon one of life's great lessons. I had learnt to take pleasure in what is available rather than yearn for the unobtainable.

Then, one day as I sat on the step watching what I considered now as my little feathered family, I heard a sound and looked up. There, feeding on the parrot sticks which I had hung on a hook on the patio many weeks before, were two crimson rosellas. They were magnificent in their colourful plumage and my heart leapt to see them there.

However, it was the ordinary magpies that had already lifted my spirits and encouraged me to think of my new garden as home. Hopefully, one day, it will rain again, and I shall proceed with my plans to plant my dream garden with bird-attracting natives. Thank you, magpies.

LYN MCGRATH

Last week a picture of a Crimson Rosella was incorrectly captioned an Eastern Rosella.