Spring = Magpie Magic

Top: There were plenty of 'Warning Magpie territory' signs on the BVRT, but, like the maggies, they were hit and miss.

Above: A maggie inspecting Jayne's new PieProof helmet.

As spring brings longer and brighter days – it also brings out the magpie. Do you adjust your usual commute to avoid aggressive maggies? Add a wide brim and stick-on-eyes to your helmet? Maybe you're oblivious to magpies until you venture out for a weekend adventure on distant rail trails.

That's me, when I cycled the 161km-long Brisbane Valley Rail Trail (BVRT) in spring 2025. I'd been warned. A friend's colleague had just cycled it for a charity ride. She forwarded me his message:

"I knew there would be angry magpies, I just didn't know how many. And man, they were persistent! … I reckon I was swooped (many making contact …) more than 100 times," he wrote.

I was prepared. I was road-testing a PieProof helmet from RTA advertiser PieProof. It's designed to protect cyclists from maggies with a beak-barrier mesh lining and removable padding around the ears.

Nothing prepared me for Harlin's relentless maggie. He dived and struck my helmet, again and again, he made contact 19 times!

Nigel, owner of The Bike Hire Company, dropped me and my hired bike at the Yarraman trailhead. "You'll get hot with that!" he said pointing to my padded ears. The Queensland temperatures would exceed 30° Celsius. He handed me a short reflective streamer to attach to my helmet to deflect maggies. I pocketed it, thinking it was overkill.

The first magpie swooped me minutes later. First he sang to me from the ground nearby. "Hello maggie!" I replied. He then flew up into a towering gum and launched himself directly at what would have been, in any other helmet, my exposed ears. He got the padding instead. Better to be hot than bloody, I thought.

I stopped the bike and attached the streamer to the back of my helmet. Minutes later, another maggie smashed into my helmet multiple times, making a mockery of the "deflective" streamer as well.

As I rode, Nigel sent me sms updates. "Magpies active Linville to Moore and

Harlin: still sending shivers down Jayne's spine.

Harlin." Harlin. Even the word, today, sends shivers down my spine.

I was riding well. But nothing prepared me for Harlin's relentless maggie. He dived and struck my helmet. And again. One, 2, 3, 4, 5. I crossed the highway and he came too. Twelve, 13, 14 … Come on! Surely I'm out of his zone now? But no, he made contact 19 times.

Nigel had suggested 2 techniques: "Slow down and look at them, or get your bum up and cycle like mad till you're out of their territory". I tried both. Maintaining eye contact with them was terrifying and I'd swerve all over the trail. Nigel's second option was certainly more amusing for onlookers.

Like my friend's colleague, I was subject to around 100 swoops, but fewer made contact (they aim to defend, not attack). I admired their incredible, unwavering determination to protect their young.

My tips? Consider a De Brim or a modified Bunnings straw hat with a PieProof helmet (remove the ear protectors); refer to a similar example on the front cover. And, enjoy this part of spring, remembering that it's for a reason (they're just protecting their young!), just for a season.

Jayne was hosted by The Bike Hire Company and provided with a test PieProof helmet at no charge.

Transport and Main Roads Queensland also tested magpie deterrent theories on the BVRT. Watch it here: **Facebook_TMRQLD_BVRT_Magpie_Theories**

Jayne D'Arcy

All photos by Jayne D'Arcy