

Question on notice no. 212

Portfolio question number: 212

2019-20 Supplementary budget estimates

**Finance and Public Administration Committee, Parliamentary departments
Portfolio**

Senator Kimberley Kitching: asked the Department of Parliamentary Services on 14 November 2019—

1. How often do Floyd (female falcon) , Wot (barking owl) and Tilley (goshawk) patrol the grounds at Parliament House?
2. Has their presence made a noticeable difference to the quantity of magpies and ducks when they are on patrol?
3. What about when the three raptors are not present at Parliament House, has there been a noticeable difference to the quantity of magpies and ducks?
4. Has expert advice has been obtained regarding alternative methods to keep rogue magpies away? If yes, can a copy be provided?
5. Can the Department advise how much it has spent to date on fake birds, bird kites and related items, including the engagement of Floyd, Wot and Tilley and their handlers?
6. Have there been any injuries as a direct result of swooping birds?

Answer —

Please see answer attached.

**Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee —
Supplementary Budget Estimates – Spill over Hearing—14
November 2019 - Answers to Questions on Notice**

Parliamentary departments, Department of Parliamentary Services

Topic: **Feathered enforcement team**
Question: **212**
Written: **Senator KITCHING**

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 19 December 2019

- 1 How often do Floyd (female falcon), Wot (barking owl) and Tilley (goshawk) patrol the grounds at Parliament House?
- 2 Has their presence made a noticeable difference to the quantity of magpies and ducks when they are on patrol?
- 3 What about when the three raptors are not present at Parliament House, has there been a noticeable difference to the quantity of magpies and ducks?
- 4 Has expert advice has been obtained regarding alternative methods to keep rogue magpies away? If yes, can a copy be provided?
- 5 Can the Department advise how much it has spent to date on fake birds, bird kites and related items, including the engagement of Floyd, Wot and Tilley and their handlers?
- 6 Have there been any injuries as a direct result of swooping birds?

Answer

1. The Falcon, Goshawk and Barking Owl have patrolled Parliament House over three periods for the calendar year 2019, and approximately one week in each period.
2. Yes
3. Yes
4. A range of control strategies have been attempted since 2017. These include bird sounders, an eagle kite and additional bird spikes in certain areas which have had limited success. In search of an alternative approach, DPS approached Full Flight Conservation Centre to investigate and recommend strategies to control and reduce pest bird impact on site. A copy of the mitigation proposal is at Attachment A.
5. As at 9 September 2019, DPS has spent \$49,347.11 (GST inclusive) on bird deterrence.
6. DPS does not have documented evidence of injuries, however the aggressive behaviour of magpies that have become desensitised to human presence is an evident nuisance for anybody possessing food in the courtyards and terraces. The hyper aggressive nature of magpies in spring causes people to avoid outdoor spaces as their aggression is common knowledge.

Mitigation proposal:

Overview: The location has a number of different pest bird issues and the impact areas are in different areas, therefore the plan to control the individual species is problematic and must be adopted according to each individual problem.

Because of the complexity of the problem, the number of species and the location I have allowed multiple visits to ensure all the programs are implemented and successful in the long term.

Control Program: Australian Magpie & Ravens.

Observations - The main problems from the Magpies and Ravens include stealing food, aggressive behaviour towards staff, damage to infrastructure and fouling the pavements and building surfaces with their mutes-(droppings)

Bird numbers in and around the impact areas seem to be about 15-20 individuals. This population may increase or decrease depending on the season, weather and food availability. These birds are probably from the same family or at least related. Magpies and ravens have a complex social structure and teach their young how to hunt and find food. This will include stealing and robbing the food available to them. They have habituated themselves to the site to over a period of years and therefore have become imprinted in their behaviour and on the surroundings. They are so familiar with their surroundings that they are mostly undisturbed by most external influences. Their aggressive behaviour will continue to be a problem if left unchecked and in fact probably will increase as more dominant birds stamp their authority on the space.

Control Program- Magpies are protected by law and cannot be harmed or harassed in any way without a permit. If Full Flights proposal is accepted, we will apply for the appropriate permits to remove the birds and have the permit in place before the control program commences.

The proposed control plan will consist of using raptors (Brown Goshawks) to move the magpies and Ravens away from the courtyard areas and use live trapping on the roof tops. Areas for traps, to be confirmed once the program is given the go to proceed. The birds will then be relocated / released at a predetermined site. The traps are live capture, Full Flight design. Location of traps will be on the roof areas away from staff and public. Clearing of traps will take place away from view and the birds transported in approved carry boxes.



An example for a trap location.
A screen will be erected to shield the trap from any public view

Control Program: Feral Pigeons:

Observations -a small number of birds have established themselves in and around the northern side of the building. Observed nesting in the underground carpark area along with large number of mutes on the floor area of the carpark. There are also a considerable number of droppings (mutes) around the entry area of the building on the north side. Observed the birds foraging around the garden areas and front entrance - Feral pigeons are a highly invasive species. If they are given an opportunity to establish a colony, they will do so. These birds have the ability to produce crop milk which means they can breed all year round and produce large amount of off spring every year.

Control Program-

Trapping and using raptors if required. The control will consist of flying Peregrine Falcons around the high impact areas to drive the pigeons away. The established birds with nests will have to be netted or trapped to remove them.

Control Program: Seagulls and ducks.

Observations: A small numbers of birds visit the fountain area probably foraging for food or taking advantage of water. The main problem seems to be mutes left by the birds on the pavement and surrounding walkways. I wouldn't consider that these small populations will increase in size, however Silver Gulls can be very invasive and commonly use buildings for nesting. These groups of birds seem to be more opportunistic than permanent, but care should be taken that they don't get established.

The control will consist of flying Peregrine Falcons around the high impact areas to drive the gulls and ducks away. Full Flight has used this prey predator response method many times with great success.

Note: A maintenance plan may have to be implemented in the future to remove any vagrant birds.



Location showing mutes on pavement and the location where the raptors will be flown to deter the gulls and ducks.