

Penguin

You might think this story is about a penguin that lives in Antarctica. No, this is not the case. Penguin is the name of a bird that was rescued by a family in Australia, and this bird became their pet. The bird was an Australian magpie. The Bloom family called the bird 'Penguin' because a magpie is black and white like a penguin.

One day young Noah was playing in the back yard when he discovered a small magpie chick lying injured on the grass, after being blown out of her nest, high up in a Norfolk Island pine tree. She was very lucky to survive such a horrendous fall. Without immediate care the baby bird would have died within a day. Noah and his Mum took her into the house. They built her a simple nest, made from an old cane laundry basket, and kept her warm with a tiny blanket. Noah and his Mum decided to name her Penguin, because of her black and white feathers and large feet. The decision was made that Penguin could live in the house with the family until she was fully healed and strong enough to fend for herself.



It is not easy to look after any injured wild creature and this is especially true of a fragile baby bird. Caring for Penguin during those first few weeks was a massive commitment, but at the same time it was a wonderful experience for the family.

They tried to learn as much as they could about magpies. They used the internet and got some advice from their local vet. Knowing what to feed Penguin was very important. Australian magpies are omnivores, meaning they will eat almost anything, but during their critical growth phase, the nestlings consume a lot of insects, far more than the family could ever hope to provide. They gave Penguin a digestible diet that was high in lean protein. The food contained all the essential nutrients she needed to form strong bones and flight feathers.

Initially Penguin had to be fed every two hours during the day but slept through the night. Noah and his two brothers, Oli and Rueben, took turns with feeding duty. After preparing a special mix of ingredients into a kind of magpie porridge, the boys would pinch a small amount of food on the tips of their fingers and hold it above Penguin's head, more or less like a mother bird would do with a beak-full of grubs. Penguin would lunge greedily at her meal and almost swallow half the children's fingers in the process!

While getting Penguin to eat was a real victory, her recovery was not so certain. There were days when Penguin looked so weak, they thought they might lose her,

and there were some evenings when they knew there was a chance that she wouldn't survive the night. But the family continued to do all they could for the smallest member of their family and over time she grew in both stature and confidence. After a while she started to perch on a branch they had attached to her basket, and soon after that she began to explore her world and discover her abilities. The day came when Penguin took her very first flight - inside the lounge-room! It was an amazing moment!

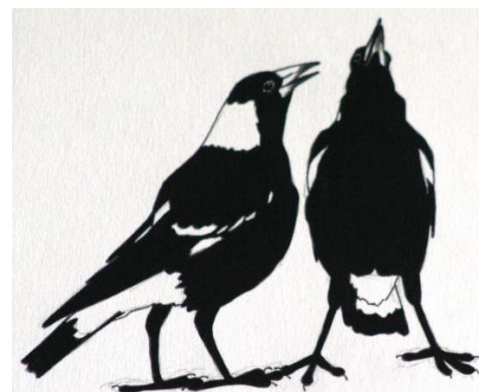
As Penguin's strength grew, so did her curiosity. Penguin was never locked inside any kind of cage, so she was always free to venture outside the house. It didn't take long before she started to forage for her own food in the backyard and it was clear she was becoming increasingly independent.

Despite being free to leave she still chose to sleep inside the house for at least six months – mostly in her basket but also up on the window sill. Although the family loved having her with them, they also wanted her to follow her natural behaviours.

There is no such thing as potty-training a magpie. This became a problem. Penguin "redecorated" the furniture, cushions, lounge and computers with her bird poo over and over again. It was finally time for her to officially move out.

Fortunately, there was a large frangipani tree in the yard that Penguin always felt comfortable in, so that became her home. However, if a window was ever left open, she would fly inside the house at sunrise and scamper down the hallway to one of the bedrooms and jump into bed with one of the family, rolling over onto her back just to say hi.

Australian magpies are known for their beautiful songs and Penguin certainly had a wonderful voice. She began singing short songs during the day from a very early age and would eventually sing for hours and hours at a time. Whenever the car pulled up in the driveway after being away from the house, she'd let out a loud and melodic warble to welcome the family home, then flap her wings with excitement and run straight to the front door to be let inside.



Penguin always seemed to know exactly when the boys would be walking home from school. At around 3.30pm she would position herself in the orange tree at the edge of the yard, waiting for them to come around the corner and into view. As soon as she heard them approaching, she would break out in song and the

boys would happily reply in their best magpie impersonation, and then she would call back to them again – just as if they were having a musical conversation.

Penguin grew up to be a beautiful adult bird, but it wasn't always easy for her. Older resident Magpies are fiercely territorial and at times attacked her, tearing out feathers and inflicting painful wounds with their sharp beaks to let her know that this is their turf. If Penguin was ever caught in the wrong place at the wrong time, she would carry out a swift retreat, flying at top speed through any open door or window into the safety of the house.



Despite her many encounters with bully-birds Penguin maintained a bright and friendly personality and was kind to all the birds she met. She built a close friendship with a Pied-Currawong, with whom she shared food scraps at the back door. She also baby-sat a sickly rainbow lorikeet. Once she befriended another young magpie who timidly came inside the house and sat with Penguin by the window. It was as if they were having a first date!

While Penguin was always part of Bloom family, the world was hers to explore. She regularly traveled elsewhere, sometimes for days at a time. During the Christmas holidays in 2014 she disappeared for six long weeks, and the family started to fear the worst – but then, with a large squawk, she suddenly appeared at the front door on Rueben's birthday, which was incredibly special.

Penguin would come and go as it pleased her. The Bloom family wouldn't see her for a while and then, without warning, she would confidently walk in the door as if nothing had changed. She would jump straight back up onto the kitchen sink for a drink of water and then start to poke about the house looking for tasty things to eat. Spiders were her favourite!

<https://www.penguinhemagpie.com/penguins-story/>