

I used to think animal psychologists were a bit of a farce. Human psychologists were bad enough, but animals needing to talk through their problems that was just too far fetched.

That was until we made the move to the country. We had a succession of crazy animals that not only needed help but certainly forced me to reconsider my sanity and the sanity of the move.

Having a pet cocky should have been the least threatening of all the choices of pets. Sure the odd one will take a finger and may even share the occasional profanity with your dear old grandmother, but generally they are pretty harmless. Or so I thought.

Jeriko the Galah came to live with us as a hand me down. He had flown into a friend's garden and sort of taken up residence. They had him in a very small cockies cage and were keen to let us have him as we had a nice sized Aviary complete with another Galah called Fred. We had named him Fred as we considered it would be an easy name to teach him to say. Fred later turned out to be a female, laying an egg after about four years of ownership and it was far too late to change it to Fredrika.

We should have listened to Fred. She took an instant dislike to Jeriko. But again not having that psychologist to fall back on, we assumed it was just that Fred had never really shared her cage with anyone and this space invasion was quite foreign.

The first sign of Jeriko being a couple of snaggers short of a barbie came very early. Jeriko, some time in his checkered past, had developed a liking for blood. Not just any blood, not even just anyone's blood, specifically my blood. He would draw it at every opportunity.

Jeriko was one of those birds that appeared to love a scratch. But what he was really doing was encouraging you to put your fingers in his cage. A mad look would cross his face and shortly after there would be blood. Needless to say scratching was now not an option.

This bothered Jeriko. If the fingers weren't coming to Jeriko, then Jeriko would need to get to the source. He set about escaping.

Galah's have strong beaks. They need them to crack open seeds and the like and they are very handy also for weakening wire. Patience and persistence paid off. Like a POW working on a plan to escape from a prison camp, Jeriko worked on the lowest part of the wire, out of sight of the humans, until he had a hole big enough to squeeze through. Jeriko was now free to reign terror on the unsuspecting humans. Hitchcocks "Birds" the movie was really not that far from the truth...

Instead of taking flight and joining the wild Galahs that frequented our small property, Jeriko hung around to wreak havoc. He had taken residence in a large blue gum tree strategically positioned to allow him to see all entrance and exits from the house. Like a

wedge tailed eagle swooping on an unsuspecting rabbit, he would launch himself down attacking me from behind and latching onto any exposed flesh, usually ears or neck. A silent swoop, a massive blood curdling human scream, followed by a satisfied squawk as he returned to the high branches to set up for the next attack. Having my ears pierced by a cocky's beak was the last thing I was expecting. Getting to the car now required planning and reconnaissance. An umbrella had also become a handy protective device.

Jeriko needed to up the anti. Returning from work, head leaned forward towards the windscreen, peering up, scanning the branches for Jeriko, my heart nearly stopped. Jeriko appeared, whacking against the glass, obviously thinking he had an easy strike. I slammed on the skids, sliding to a halt on the gravel only to see Jeriko tearing at my windscreen wiper rubbers. I turned them on thinking the movement would scare him off but that just got him more excited. Jeriko was squealing with delight at having scared the pants off me and taken out my blue XC panel van in with the bargain. I made a dash for the door thinking the car would occupy him for enough time for me to get inside. Grasping for the handle, I felt the breeze of his wings against my neck. I turned to catch in mid flight, Jeriko's wide open beak as he landed on his favorite neck, mine! Fending him off made no difference. I scrambled for the door yelling to my wife, who thought I had been exaggerating all along. This time she had seen the entire episode. And fighting back the tears, from fits of laughter, she was searching for the key to the deadlock.

Jeriko had stepped up his attack. He would not be put off, he swooped again, but this time I had to make a stand. Bleeding from the ears, trembling from fear of the bird, and anger at the misses for not getting the door open, I stood my ground. Down he swooped, squawking loudly, a mad look in his eye. I lined him up and like Alan Border, pulling a short pitched delivery to the boundary, I swung my sports bag at him.

The front door opened just in time to see Jeriko attached to my sports bag, being tossed out into the garden. We watched from the safety of the house as he tore into the bag, for what seemed like hours but was probably only a few minutes. And then he was gone.

I am still a little apprehensive when I hear the chatters of the native Galahs as they visit to enjoy the eucalypt seeds. I reach for my ears instinctively and perhaps a psychologist could help there. But the large blue gum is gone now, removed partly because of white ants but mostly because of its history and the scars it left on my memories of Jeriko.

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