

MARTYR

[after the painting of the same name by Daniela Bradley, 2012]



1.

The mother so distressed, a plover pecked her son, was compelled to campaign. Blood was drawn she said, and invited me to join her Facebook page, ‘The Conservative Management of Pesky Plovers’.

2.

Initially, the mother posted only occasionally, offering titbits of advice such as, ‘an eggless-nest is a simple fix: pick it up, bin it.’ Now my newsfeed is swamped with these posts. She updates her status about twenty times a day, with things like, ‘omnivorous disease-causing plover-poop covers everything,’ and ‘whatever you do, when a plover attacks, don’t lie-down,’ and ‘lock-away your birdbaths the plovers are coming.’

The mother and her son live (four doors down) in the white fibro house, with manicured lawns and flowering star-jasmine.

3.

The manager of IGA is also the local Australian Seabird Rescue volunteer. He told me the Egyptian plover is referred to as the toothpick-bird. Egyptian plovers, unlike our awkward black-helmeted yellow-masked plovers, wear black as if it were a fashion statement. Only segments of white separate their jet-black crowns, masks, backs and breast-bands. And wear tinges of blue (on their legs and wings) with pride and importance, like interns masquerading surgical scrubs. On the Nile, Egyptian plovers earn their keep by cleaning crocodile's teeth.

I think they should be called croc-bytes.

A float of crocodiles is the collective noun for a group of crocodiles.

4.

Recently, the mother uploaded a picture of herself, pegging out washing. For protection she wore a plastic ice-cream container on her head, red flag jetting out the top. In conjunction with the photo was a microblog-thesis.

- Remove plover-eggs from within and around your yards.
- Wear rubber gloves.
- Fasten a washing-basket to your head, use tea-towels as cushioning.
- Ensure gloves are on securely, head's protected, dog's locked-up, and go outside.
- Go to nest (on ground somewhere).
- Make no sudden jerking-movements.
- Pick eggs up, usually 2 or 3 brown-speckled sandy-coloured twenty-cent-piece size eggs.
- Take eggs to sand dunes, be sure plovers are following.
- Scrape a shallow depression in sand, lay eggs.

It had  91  Like, I didn't  Like or  Share.

5.

The manager tells me that sometimes plovers strategically feign injury, dragging a sandy-coloured wing along the ground, attracting and distracting potential predators. Sometimes, instead of swooping and piping, plovers just carry-on behaving casually, pecking in the sand, pretending to eat, as though there were nothing worth protecting.

He says the truth unfolds when someone or something gets too close to the fuzzy grey-hatchlings.

Alarm in a plover's voice is warning mistaken for anger.

Martyr *n.* **1** a person who suffers or pretends to suffer in order to obtain sympathy or pity. **2** (foll. by *to*) a constant sufferer from (an ailment)

6.
The manager questioned the mother's status, 'Plover Spurs are Poisonous,' asking, 'isn't the boy killing plovers in this clip your child?' And posted a  video on her page.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dn0-9BwdSII>

The post promptly disappeared.

7.
Perhaps the plover should take a leaf from the Osprey's book, and build nests on top of light-posts and mooring-pylons.

A duet of ospreys is the collective noun for ospreys.

8.
A few nights ago, when the manager was leaving IGA he found a plover, neck wrung and de-winged, between the windscreen and wiper-blade of his car.

A wing of plovers is the collective noun for a group of plovers.

Martyr *n.* **3** a person who is put to death for refusing to renounce a faith or belief.

9.

Dozens of rotten eggs were hurled at the mother's car.

10.

The manager used to live in Adelaide where he worked with Mr Percival, the pelican from the film *Storm Boy*. He tells me that after filming the movie in 1976, Mr Percival spent twelve-years at Marineland aquarium, then lived at Adelaide Zoo until, in September 2009, he died from old age. Thirty-something. The zookeepers called him Gringo.

A pod of pelicans is the collective noun for a group of pelicans. A squadron of pelicans is the collective noun for pelicans in flight. A raft of pelicans is the collective noun for pelicans on water.

11.

Superglue was squirted into the locks at IGA. It took the manager three-hours to pry open the sliding doors.

12.

Plover nests were raided. Eggs were smashed.

13.

Silently, we stood watching plovers collect and carry away pieces of shattered shell in their pale-yellow beaks. The birds continued coming back again and again, yellow lidless eyes scouring the sand, until the last unhatched fragment had been carted away.

14.

Martyrdom *n.* **1** the sufferings and death of a martyr. **2** torment.
martyr *v.tr. & refl.* make a martyr of. □□ **martyr** *n.*¹

¹ Bradley, 'Martyr', painting in 'An Implicit Inheritance', exhibited Lismore Regional Gallery, April-June 2013, <http://danielabradley.com/painting.-daniela-bradley.html>