

# Bully birds no myna matter

By Col Allison

YOU see them in their thousands at dusk at the Castle Hills shops: Indian myna birds flying in to roost. At dawn these so-called rats of the skies fly out again to forage, and drive out all rivals.

The World Conservation Union considers the introduced myna - *Acridotheres tristis* - among the 100 most invasive pests, and a threat to Australia.

The union's Gary Cunich estimated that there are more than a million of the invaders infesting Baulkham Hills Shire alone, with "about 3000 of them living at my place in West Pennant Hills and 400 in

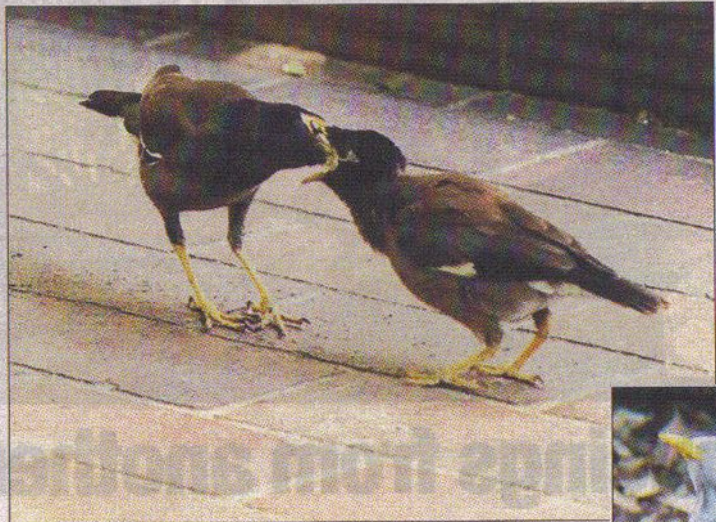
approval, several councils and organisations abroad have expressed interest in buying one. It costs \$275.

Ku-ring-gai, Ryde and Penrith councils are using the conventional traps, and this week Mr Cunich is talking with Baulkham Hills Council.

Mr Cunich said he became interested in Indian mynas during a stop at the NSW/Queensland border when a local complained about the rising number of the pests.

"I said 'what are they?' I didn't have a clue," he said.

"I want our kids and grandkids to see native birds in the wild. The mynas have driven most of the smaller birds from suburbia and it's been esti-



Rivals: Indian mynas (left) feeding and (below) the Aussie noisy miner, considered the only hope against the invaders.

Pictures: Fairfax Digital Collection

**'If they spot a kookaburra or currawong nesting, they kill off their young ... They're afraid of nothing'**

- Bird trap inventor Gary Cunich

a tree two doors down the road".

Mr Cunich, 61, a sales and marketing professional, has invented what he calls the native bird rescue unit, a walk-in funnel trap which can catch 300 mynas at a time.

Many of his smaller traps are in use in backyards across the state and although his new 3.6 metre x 1.5 metre trap is still hush-hush as Mr Cunich awaits final patent

mated that if they're not stopped within 20 years, there will be a solid band of them from the east to the west coast."

Mr Cunich said mynas take over a territory by stealth.

"When two birds arrive in a new habitat they mix with the native birds - 'How ya going?', that sort of thing.

"But within 12 months there's 25 mynas and their tune changes to 'Right, this is our area and you're out, mate'.

"Myna families then allocate feeding areas on a chequerboard pattern and control that range ruthlessly.

"In the nesting season they go through everything, finding nests of other birds. They turf the young out or build nests on top or fill the rival nests with rubbish.

"They drive out possums, sugar gliders. If they spot a kookaburra or currawong nesting they kill off the young or dive-bomb the nesting birds and drive them out.

"They're afraid of nothing. "In Fiji, 97 per cent of all birds are now Indian mynas.

"They're a real menace.

"In drought conditions, they'll breed up to four times a year, while native birds stop breeding."

Mr Cunich said the only bird that manages to halt the myna is the native noisy miner. "If you have enough of these - as we do increasingly in the Hills - they keep the Indians off the property using exactly the same tactics as the pests."

Mr Cunich is taking his native bird rescue unit on a tour of NSW, Victoria and Queensland to publicise the plight of native birds.

