



Britain's Nicky Moss poses next to an eagle statue in Manilla February 2, 2007. REUTERS/Godfrey Wenness/Handout

Paraglider attacked by wild eagles

By Rob Taylor

CANBERRA (Reuters) - Britain's top female paraglider has cheated death after being attacked by a pair of "screeching" wild eagles while competition flying in Australia.

Nicky Moss, 38, watched terrified as two huge birds began tearing into her parachute canopy, one becoming tangled in her lines and clawing at her head 2,500 metres in the air.

"I heard screeching behind me and a eagle flew down and attacked me, swooping down and bouncing into the side of my wing with its claws," Moss told Reuters on Friday.

"Then another one appeared and together they launched a sustained attack on my glider, tearing at the wing."

One of the giant wedge-tailed eagles became wrapped in the canopy lines and slid down towards Moss, lashing at her face with its talons as her paraglider plummeted towards the ground.

"It swooped in and hit me on the back of the head, then got tangled in the glider which collapsed it. So I had a very, very large bird wrapped up screeching beside me as I screamed back," Moss said.

She said she thought about dumping her parachute-style canopy and using the reserve.

"But then I would have been descending on my reserve as the birds continued shredding it, which I wasn't happy about," she said.

The encounter happened on Monday while Moss -- a member of the British paragliding team -- was preparing for world titles this month at Manilla in northern New South Wales state.

Wedge-tailed eagles are Australia's largest predatory birds and have a wing-span of more than two metres.

Moss said the attack ended after the second bird freed itself and the glider reached a height of only 100m from the ground, taking her outside the territory of the pair, who probably mistook her as a bird intruder.

Veteran Australian paraglider pilot Godfrey Wenness said eagle attacks were rare, but Moss had been flying

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in an area where the birds were not accustomed to human pilots.

"Eagles are the sharks of the air. But if you're a regular they just treat you pretty indifferently," he said.

Moss, who crashed into a gum tree in Australia last year while flying in Victoria, said her latest encounter had not put her off flying.

"I see the eagles quite often and they are incredibly beautiful, but I must say I have never been so relieved to reach the ground," she said.

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