

Eagles nearly killed me, paraglider says

► Attack high in the Australian sky

► Bird becomes entangled in lines

Benard Lagan

Britain's top woman paraglider told yesterday how she cheated death after two huge eagles attacked her, sending her into freefall, 8,200ft (2,500m) above the Australian Outback.

Nicky Moss, 38, said that she thought, "Why me?", when the eagles came screeching out of the sky and began shredding the fabric wing of her paraglider over the remote northern area of New South Wales this week.

She spun out of control and into a terrifying 1,600ft freefall when one of the birds became entangled in the lines suspending her beneath the glider, collapsing the wing and sending her diving toward Earth.

Wedge-tailed eagles are among the world's largest raptors and are Australia's biggest bird of prey. They are known to swoop upon sheep and their wings may span more than 8ft.

Moss, who was training with the British team for the World Paragliding Championships, to be held in Australia, said that she had been soaring on air currents when she heard a screeching sound from behind.

"I looked around then the top surface of my wing deformed as an eagle flew straight into the top of me."

"It ripped the canopy and then wheeled around and continued to have other goes for quite a long time," she said. "Another eagle joined it. I was bombarded by wedge-tailed eagles. They tore my glider. There were rips in it from their talons.

"One of them dived at me from behind, hit me on the back of the head and flew through the lines of my glider and got tangled up."

With the huge bird caught in the lines the glider began to fold, sending Moss into a stall and freefall. "It collapsed the



glider completely. We were plummeting for 500m before the eagle got himself out," she said.

Moss said that she thought of using her emergency parachute but decided that the

eagles might attack and damage that, too, leaving her with no back-up. As the eagle escaped the lines, she regained control but the birds continued their attack.

"I screamed at the eagles. I just had to carry on flying. I got out of the skies as quickly as I could by doing some manoeuvres and at about 100m from the ground the eagles left me alone. I landed in a paddock."

Her dramatic brush with the eagles was seen from the ground by other competitors.

"Everybody said I was very lucky," Moss said. "Lucky to get away with it."

Moss, a former chartered quantity surveyor from Loughborough, Leicestershire, gave up her profession in 2002 to concentrate on paragliding. She now lives in Barcelona.

One of the world's most accomplished and best known paragliders, her successes include breaking the British out-and-return distance record and winning the Himalayan Open, the most challenging women's paragliding event.



Moss, training for the British team, heard "screeching"