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Near miss: Paragliding champion Nicky Moss has a less fraught encounter with an eagle in northern New South Wales yesterday. Earlier this week, a pair of wedge-tailed eagles became enraged as she flew into their territory, and began tearing up the canopy of her paraglider. Picture: REUTERS

Screeching eagles attack paraglider

■ AUSTRALIA

BRITAIN'S top female paraglider has cheated death after being attacked by a pair of "screeching" wild eagles while training for a competition 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 2500 metres in the air.

"I heard screeching behind me and an eagle flew down and attacked me, swooping down and bouncing into the side of my wing with its claws," Moss said yesterday.

"Then another one appeared, and

together they launched a sustained attack on my glider, tearing at the wing."

The encounter happened this week while Moss — a member of the British paragliding team — was preparing for world titles this month in northern New South Wales.

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

Wedge-tailed eagles, Australia's biggest predatory birds, have a wingspan of more than two metres. Moss said the attack ended after the second bird freed itself and the glider reached a height of only 100 metres, taking her outside the territory of the pair, who probably mistook her for an intruding bird.

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

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