

# Businessman in call for tax dodger GP's release

WELL-known Dublin businessman Michael Wright has called for the release of a GP jailed for 16 months for failing to pay almost €100,000 in income tax.

Last week, Bassam Naser, 51, pleaded guilty at Dublin Circuit Criminal Court to two charges of filing incorrect returns with his income tax affairs for the years 2006 and 2007.

Since then many of the doctor's patients have signed a petition calling for the overturning of a court decision to jail the GP, of Howth Road, Sutton, in Dublin, for 16 months.

Yesterday, well-known businessman Mr Wright, of seafood business Wrights of Howth, told RTE radio's Liveline that Dr

By **Seán Dunne**

Naser was not doing 'well' in Mountjoy Prison.

'This is a very special man,' Mr Wright said of the popular family doctor.

'I am a patient of Dr Sam's,' he said. 'He looks after my family and my father who passed away a number of years ago.'

Mr Wright said that so many of Dr Naser's patients had signed the petition for his release because the GP had always gone above and beyond his care of duty for patients.

And he revealed that Dr Naser is finding his current circumstances very difficult. 'He's not managing very well [in Mount-

joy],' Mr Wright said. 'He's a very soft-natured man and he's a doctor. He's a man that cares for other people. I believe he's in the bakery in Mountjoy which makes me upset.'

'What are we doing in this country?' said Mr Wright.

Last week the court heard Mr Naser had a hidden bank account into which he lodged 1,686 cheques received from patients attending his clinic. He was due to pay almost €100,000 in income tax and now owes a further €200,000 in penalties. He had a €100,000 cheque in court to pay the overdue tax.

Mr Wright said it was 'madness' that such a 'great doctor' was behind bars in Mountjoy.

# Dr Mark Dooley



## MORAL MATTERS

# One for sorrow, two for despair – beware the thugs of the bird world

**R**EGULAR readers will know that I am a bird-lover. It is not that I spend my spare time moving gingerly among the hedges peering through a set of binoculars. I am simply one of those who sees, in a blue tit or a robin, a small miracle of nature.

The blue tit, in particular, is a bird crafted in paradise. It is as though this tiny creature were hand-painted with the most vibrant colours of a celestial rainbow. Blue, purple, yellow, white and green – it is a flying work of art.

And who is not comforted by the soothing sound of birdsong? To wake to that blessed symphony, is to hear the voice of creation chanting psalms to all that is good and beautiful. Even as I write, I am being serenaded by a finch who seems intent on making my work as pleasurable as possible.

Living side-by-side with such a variety of birds adds wonder and harmony to life. They are glorious to behold, marvellous to savour, and what garden would be complete without them? Like music and art, they render the natural world a place of peace and perfection.

Except, that is, for one creature whose goal in life seems to be to cause untold carnage. It is the only bird that I will chase out of our garden – the only one that is never welcome. And yet, however hard I try, I cannot stop its battalions from invading our sacred space.

I speak of the magpie, that stalking, squawking nuisance which terrifies and preys on smaller birds. First, you hear the wild squawks – a sign that a legion is incoming. Suddenly, they swoop down from the sky and invade the trees. Within seconds, they have occupied the entire garden.

Like aliens, they march around their newly conquered territory searching for opposition. Gone are the heavenly harmonies to which we have been treated all morning. Now, the garden resounds to a coarse chorus which is both defiant and menacing.

Beware of birds that cannot sing for they are intent on silencing those who can. I saw this one morning with my own horrified eyes. A bunch of thuggish magpies attacked a beautiful little bird,

almost killing it in the process. But then, instead of putting the poor little creature out of its agony, they began squabbling over whose prey it was. They were like a criminal gang turning on each other over the proceeds of their villainy. So busy were they fighting, that they didn't notice me retrieving their mortally wounded victim.

Now, it is a scientific fact that magpies are exceedingly intelligent. It is a very social bird that can actually recognise its own reflection in a mirror. This makes it unique in the avian community, and proves that the magpie is not only shrewd, but also highly sophisticated. Indeed, it is a par with advanced creatures such as chimpanzees, dolphins and elephants.

Still, none of this – however extraordinary – can detract from the fact that the magpie is a bully. That is why, at the first sign of an invasion team, I slam shut the nearest window. No, this is not to prevent them entering the house, although I also have a story to relate on that score.

One day, Mrs Dooley and I were returning from our walk when we spotted something gazing at us from inside the house. 'It's a magpie!', I screamed, before racing in to do battle. The bird was bleeding from a surface scrape and had already destroyed the curtains. After a struggle, I somehow managed to set it free, but not before the incident took a heavy toll on my nervous system.

**B**UT the reason I slam the window is because it is the only sound which seems to scare them away. I know they are not human and are driven by instinct to do the things they do. However, it is just too much to let them take over, especially when I know they have come to terrorise our singing angels of the air.

In the end, I suppose this says much more about me than the magpie. I know that nature can sometimes be very savage, but it is also something deeply complex and, in the case of the magpie, wonderfully intelligent. But, for me, that is not enough to redeem a creature that puts in peril the sheer majesty of nature's most triumphant creations.

For how can you possibly admire intelligence at the expense of beauty, music and colour?

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