

Magpies Nest in Department Store Logo in Ningbo, Sparking Ecological Dialogue

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A well-preserved environment nurtures a thriving city.



Magpies are building their nest within the logo of Ningbo Hankyu Department Store. (Photo: Yang Chuxiong)

Recently, in the urban area of Ningbo, east China's Zhejiang Province, an unexpected spectacle has captured the city's attention. High above the bustling streets, nestled within the logo of Ningbo Hankyu Department Store, a pair of magpies are building their nest. Their chosen shelter—tucked into the lower strokes of the character "阪"—has sparked a broader conversation: How can commercial spaces and nature coexist in modern cities?

The nesting site is an example of urban ecology in action. Positioned on the store's northwest-facing exterior, the nest benefits from natural shelter provided by a nearby corridor, shielding it from wind and rain. The black metal framework of the logo resembles the sturdy branches of a tree, offering an unexpectedly stable foundation. Observers report that the nest occupies nearly two-thirds of the available space, a testament to the magpies' resourcefulness.

Despite its prominence, the nest's occupants have remained elusive. Enthusiasts armed with cameras, drones, and telephoto lenses have gathered in hopes of spotting the magpies, which are widely regarded as a symbol of good luck in China. The mystery has only fueled public fascination. Even international visitors have joined the buzz—British travel YouTubers "OTWD", who boast tens of thousands of followers, took to Instagram and RedNote, inviting fans to suggest names for the feathered residents in Ningbo.

Why Here? The Science Behind the Magpies' Choice

According to Zhang Haihua, vice president of the Ningbo Wildlife Protection Association, the magpies' decision is neither accidental nor unprecedented. As spring marks the peak of the breeding season, magpies seek nesting sites that meet three key criteria: a high vantage point, access to ample materials, and a secure environment. The structural design of the Hankyu logo, coupled with the surrounding green spaces and limited human interference, makes for an unexpectedly ideal habitat.

"Magpies are highly adaptive," Zhang explained. "They typically build their large, dome-like nests in the forks of tall trees. In this case, the rigid typography of the department store's

signage appears to serve as a modern equivalent."

He also pointed out that the birds' feeding grounds are likely nearby. Their original home remains unknown. But less than two kilometers away lies the Ningbo Eastern New Town Ecological Corridor—the city's largest downtown green space. Stretching 3.3 kilometers through the urban core, this 86-hectare corridor was designed as both a biodiversity hub and a sanctuary for city dwellers. Integrated ecological purification systems, diverse plant life, and a network of walking trails have transformed it into an ideal refuge for wildlife, reinforcing the city's commitment to sustainable urban development.

A Broader Trend in Urban Wildlife

A decade ago, magpies were a rare sight in Ningbo. Their growing presence today is a testament to the city's improving ecological conditions and shifting attitudes toward wildlife conservation. "Their choice to nest in a city-center building reflects not only the steady recovery of Ningbo's ecosystem but also a growing public respect for urban wildlife," Zhang noted.

This sentiment is echoed by Ningbo Hankyu Department Store itself. "We will not interfere," said Li Qin, a spokesperson for the store. "We encourage visitors to observe with care and respect." City officials have also acknowledged the significance of the event. "This is an example of how commercial developments can transition from merely occupying space to integrating with the urban ecosystem," said a representative from the Ningbo Municipal Bureau of Commerce.

Ningbo is not alone in this phenomenon. Across China and beyond, magpies and other

birds have increasingly made homes in unexpected places. Similar cases have been observed in Shanghai's Jing'an Kerry Centre, Beijing's Chaoyang Joy City, and even Melbourne's Chadstone Shopping Centre. These instances highlight a growing trend: urban architecture, often unintentionally, is evolving into functional wildlife habitats.



Magpies in Ningbo. (Photo: Zhang Haihua)

A Symbol of Hope

For Ningbo's magpies, the most exciting chapter may still be ahead. "We are in a crucial phase of the breeding season," Zhang said. "Over the next two months, we may witness eggs hatching and fledglings taking their first flights."

Beyond its immediate visual and ecological impact, the magpies' nesting behavior carries a deeper symbolic meaning—it demonstrates that even in a concrete jungle, wildlife can flourish if given a chance.

Ultimately, these birds are more than just an

urban curiosity. They indicate a broader shift in ecological consciousness—one where nature is no longer seen as an intrusion, but as an integral part of city life. As Ningbo continues to evolve, its relationship with the wild may do the same—one nest at a time.

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