



# Fourth Crossing Wildlife factsheet



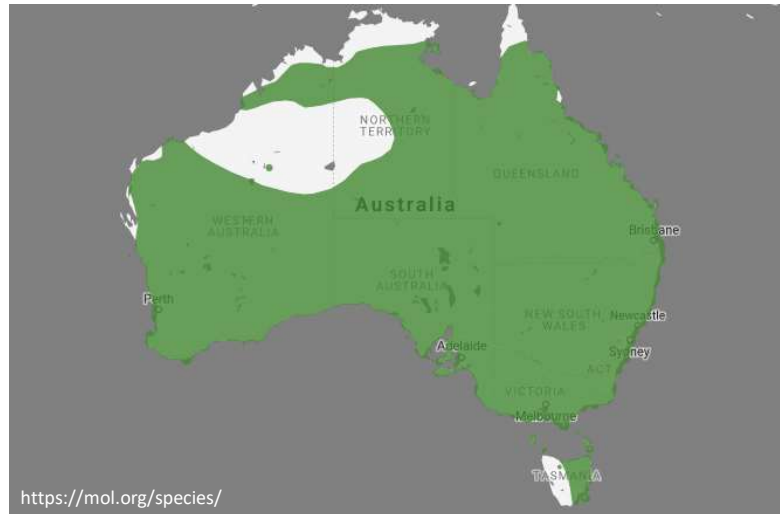
## Australian Magpie

**scientific name**  
*Gymnorhina tibicen*

**racess**  
Black-backed Magpie (*G.t tibicen*)  
White-backed Magpie (*G.t tyrannica*)  
(plus more – see page 2)



Black-backed Magpie



### Description

**Male:** (Black-backed) Mostly glossy black with prominent white nape, white shoulders and wing band, white rump and under-tail and tail with black tip. Eye red / brown. (White-backed) Similar in appearance with a full white back.

**Female:** Nape is greyer in colour, duller black.

**Juvenile:** Duller colours and more mottled, bill shorter and greyer in colour, eye black.

**Voice:** Call is a loud shout and descending caw in alarm or warning; shrieking yodel in aggression. Young beg with whining cawing. Song is organ-like fluted carolling, often in group duets

The magpie is one of Australia's best-known birds and is quite common throughout the continent. It is found in bushland, farmland, cities and country towns in all states and territories, although there are several sub-species, being the Black-Backed, White-Backed, Western Magpies (and more). The magpie has a carolling song which is really a call to pronounce its permanent territory. It lives in a complex social system, usually in a family group with a dominant male, a few females, sub-ordinate males, juveniles and fledglings. Each group normally has one dominant female where the flocks defence and support are concentrated. Smaller groups of displaced magpies, without a permanent territory, are at the bottom of the social ladder. The magpie is often seen as an aggressive bird in breeding season, swooping on unsuspecting people and animals to defend its nests. However, if the bird is left alone and not threatened it will not tend to attack intruders. Breeding season is from June to December. The nest is built in forks of trees, usually high in the tree canopy. Between 1 and 6 eggs can be laid and are normally incubated by the female for 20 days. The young are fed by both parents, and sometimes helpers within the flock. Young fledge at about 28 days but stay at heel for several weeks, being fed by both its parents until it is evicted or becomes a lesser member of the group.

## Subspecies

There are NINE subspecies of the Australian Magpie.

The original form, known as the **Black-backed Magpie** and classified as *Gymnorhina tibicen*, has been split into four races:

- *G. tibicen tibicen* - the Black-backed Magpie (nominate race)
- *G. tibicen terraereginae* - the Northern Magpie
- *G. tibicen eylandtensis* - the Top-End Magpie
- *G. tibicen longirostris* - the Long-billed Magpie

The **white-backed magpie**, originally described as *Gymnorhina hypoleuca* (but is now *Gymnorhina tibicen*...) has also been split into races:

- *G. tibicen tyrannica* - the White-backed Magpie
- *G. tibicen telonocua* - the South Australian Magpie
- *G. tibicen hypoleuca* - the Tasmanian Magpie (smaller in size than the others)
- *G. tibicen dorsalis* - the Western Magpie
- *G. tibicen papuana* - the New Guinean Magpie

### New Guinean Magpie

*G. tibicen papuana*



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...from The Taxonomic Affinity of the New Guinean Magpie *Gymnorhina Tibicen Papuana*  
By Andrew Black

The New Guinean Magpie *Gymnorhina tibicen papuana* is distinctive in several ways, especially in the exceptionally large bill, which is both longer and deeper than in other forms. In dorsal plumage it is similar to the Western Magpie *G.t. dorsalis* but in other characters it resembles the long-billed form of the Black-backed Magpie *G.t. longirostris* of north-western Australia. Little is known of its behaviour, calls, nesting, eggs and social organization.

The New Guinean and Long-billed Magpies may have been derived from a common stock, which was isolated in a northern refuge during an arid phase of the Pleistocene.

Black-backed and White-backed Magpies can be found living in New Zealand (as feral species), with the White-backed predominating.

The three subspecies are:

- *G. tibicen tibicen* - the Black-backed Magpie
- *G. tibicen tyrannica* - the White-backed Magpie
- *G. tibicen hypoleuca* - the Tasmanian Magpie

They were introduced from mainland Australia and Tasmania by Acclimatisation Societies between 1864 and 1874, mainly to control insect pests. In NZ magpies are also known as Makipae's.

### **Makipae**



[New Zealand Birds Online](#)