

# Australian Magpie

*Gymnorhina Tibicen*

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The Department of Environment and Natural Resources is responsible for the protection of native animals across South Australia and believes the type and quality of interactions people have with their local wildlife is important.

## Australian Magpie

The Australian Magpie is well-known for its characteristic and melodic chorusing call and its reputation for swooping during its breeding season. This species has become adept at surviving and breeding in highly modified environments.

## Description

The Australian Magpie is on average 41cm long with an average wing span of 76cm. It has a red-brown eye, an imposing thick triangular shaped bill that tapers evenly to a sharp dark point, a square-tipped tail and strong legs.

The adult males have strong contrasting colours of glossy rich black and their whites are cleaner than the females. In females their white nape (the back of the neck) and their back is mottled grey.



## Habitat

The Australian Magpie is found mainly in open habitats in natural areas, cleared farming areas, country towns, suburbs and cities, parks and gardens, bushland remnants, street trees and open spaces such as sporting fields and golf courses.

## Food

Australian Magpies forage mainly on the ground feeding on small insects, small lizards, frogs and carrion (the flesh of dead animals). They also eat beetle larvae found in garden lawns.

## Magpie behaviour

The Australian Magpie is a sedentary and territorial species that lives in a complex social system. Family groups strongly defend their territory against other magpies to protect food resources and nest sites all year round.



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The female magpie builds the nest herself and sits on the eggs. Swooping, by males, is the most common way of scaring off intruders (whether it is humans or other animals).

Magpies that enter another magpie territory are chased, driven to the ground and attacked by the defending magpie group.

### **Breeding season**

Usually from August to October.

### **Magpie nest**

Australian Magpies build their nests in upright forks of Eucalypt (gum) trees towards the outer canopy of the tree. They sometimes nest on artificial structures (e.g. electrical transformers, stobie (power) poles, roofs of buildings).

Their nest is an open bowl shape constructed from sticks and twigs. It is lined with softer materials such as feathers, wool, hair, fur, grass and shredded bark. Occasionally magpie nests may include wire.

### **Eggs**

Usually 3-5 eggs. The eggs are 38mm x 24mm.

The female sits on the eggs for 20 days. The young birds fledge about 38 days after hatching.

### **References**

Higgins, P.J., J.M Peter & S.J. Cowling. (Eds) 2006. Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds, Vol. 7, Part A, Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

Morcombe, Michael (2000) *Field Guide to Australian Birds*, Steve Parish Publishing Pty Ltd, Archerfield, Qld.

