

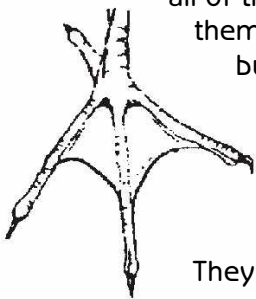
Junior Ranger Nature Notes

Junior Ranger

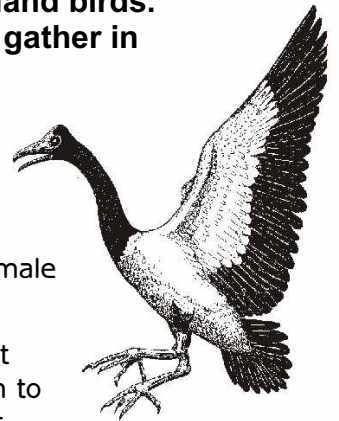
THE MAGPIE GOOSE

The Magpie Goose is one of our most conspicuous wetland birds. They're large, boldly coloured and noisy, and they can gather in enormous flocks.

The Magpie Goose is not like other geese or ducks. Other ducks and geese molt all of their flight feathers after breeding, but Magpie Geese lose them slowly, so that they can fly all year around. The prominent bump on their head gets bigger with age, but they get larger on male birds.

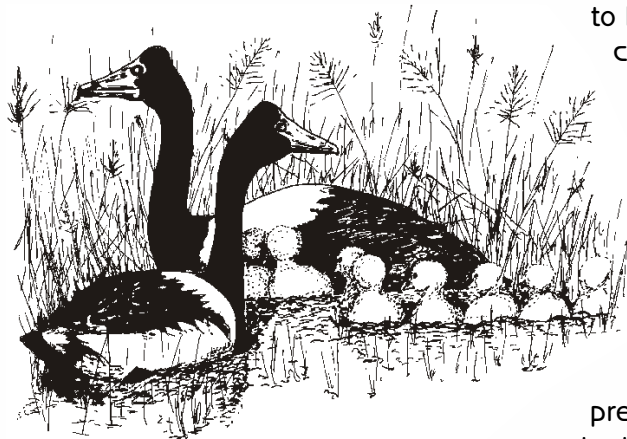


They also have hooked bills, relatively long legs and their feet have claws and a strong hind toe. This hind toe enables them to be the only goose in the world that can sleep in trees at night.



Magpie Goose
Anseranas semipalmata

They range across northern Australia from Broome to Brisbane, as well as parts of Indonesia and New Guinea. They used to be common in southern Australia, but a combination of extensive agriculture and the destruction of wetlands means they rarely visit there now.



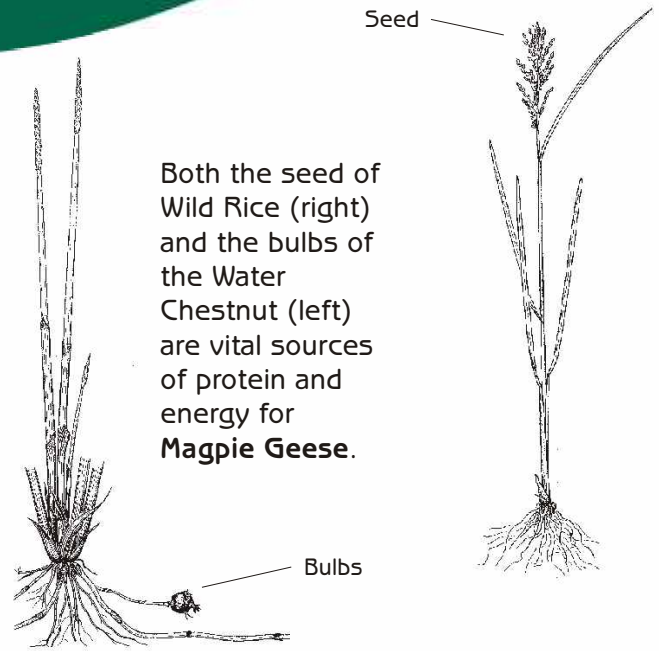
During the late wet season, between February and April, breeding colonies of up to 30,000 birds will congregate in our Top End wetlands. The majority will form into trios of one lucky male and two females, although they will also form pairs. These family groups are life long relationships. Every year they all help to build a new nest which both females will use. They lay up to 16 eggs that take about 25 days to hatch. As far as birds go, male Magpie Geese are pretty good dads. All three parents will take turns incubating and protecting the eggs. A day or two after hatching, they lead the young off to a swamp to feed.



*Protein packs: bulbs of native grasses

With help from their parents, the hatchlings mainly eat the seed of Wild Rice *Oryza meridionalis*. This seed is so packed with energy and protein that the young geese grow at an astonishing rate. A gosling can multiply its weight by 20 times in its first 7 weeks. Imagine if we did that. A 3 kg baby would weigh 60 kg after 7 weeks!

As the swamps and billabongs start to dry up, the **Magpie Geese** use their hooked bills to dig up the bulbs of the Water Chestnut *Eleocharis dulcis*. These are also very nutritious, and they allow the geese to fatten up before the end of the dry season when food becomes scarce.



Both the seed of Wild Rice (right) and the bulbs of the Water Chestnut (left) are vital sources of protein and energy for **Magpie Geese**.

STEWED GOOSE

Aboriginal people have been hunting **Magpie Geese** for thousands of years, and these days many people hunt them for food. The Parks and Wildlife Service manage this hunt to ensure that we still have plenty of **Magpie Geese** left. This is achieved by controlling things like the length of the hunting season and the number of geese that a person is allowed to take. It is determined each season according to how many geese there are. If the last breeding season was extremely successful, more hunting can be allowed. If it was a bad year for breeding, then little or no hunting will be allowed.



GOOSEY WORDS

Can you find these words in the puzzle? They go in all directions, even backwards! Starting from the top, take the first 10 letters that are left over and place them in the boxes below to discover what other characteristic makes **Magpie Geese** different to other ducks and geese.

- | | | |
|------------|---------|------------|
| BREEDING | GEESE | NUTRITIOUS |
| BULBS | GOSLING | PROTEIN |
| CHESTNUT | GRASS | RAINFALL |
| DRY SEASON | HATCH | RICE |
| EGG | HONKING | SWAMP |
| FEATHERS | HUNTING | WATERFOWL |
| FOOD | NEST | WETLANDS |

C	G	L	H	A	T	C	H	W	S	B	S
H	O	D	W	E	B	O	N	U	G	R	D
E	S	O	B	O	N	E	O	D	R	E	N
S	L	O	F	K	F	I	S	G	A	E	A
T	I	F	I	S	T	R	A	N	S	D	L
N	N	N	B	I	S	E	E	I	S	I	T
U	G	L	R	E	E	T	S	T	B	N	E
T	U	T	Q	T	N	N	Y	N	A	G	W
B	U	G	E	E	S	E	R	U	O	W	D
N	I	E	T	O	R	P	D	H	E	G	G
F	E	A	T	H	E	R	S	W	A	M	P
L	L	A	F	N	I	A	R	R	I	C	E

The Magpie Goose's scientific name, *semipalmata* means semi (or partially)

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Want to learn more about Magpie Geese?

Check out the affordable field guides *Field Guide to the Birds of Australia* by either *Simpson & Day* or the one by *Pizzey & Knight*.

