



FS12050

Magpie goose (*Anseranas semipalmata*)

Kingdom:	Animalia (Animals)
Subkingdom:	-
Super-Division:	-
Phylum/Division:	Chordata
Class:	
Sub-class:	
Order:	
Family:	Anseranatidae
Genus & species:	<i>Anseranas semipalmata</i>
Common name:	Magpie goose

The magpie goose (*Anseranas semipalmata*) is abundant on the monsoonal floodplains. Magpie geese use the landscape at a vast scale. Individuals breeding on the Mary River floodplain during the wet season, may spend the dry season in permanent waterholes in the South Alligator River. Magpie geese were also once widespread in many other areas of Australia, but are now restricted to the monsoonal north due to habitat destruction elsewhere. As with other floodplain biota, the life-history of the magpie goose reflects the annual hydrological cycle of the floodplain.

Magpie geese are long-lived animals, observed to live up to 30 years in the wild.

Magpie geese nest in large colonies in the mid to late wet season. Floating nests are built from inundated vegetation, ideally mixed stands of *Eleocharis* spp. and wild rice. The *timing* of nesting is determined by the timing of the onset of rains. The *number* of nests is determined by a combination of events, including the amount of rain falling during the transition to the wet season, and the body condition achieved by females in the preceding year.

Unpredictable and variable subsequent rainfall and flooding, mean that many nests may be drowned or washed away.

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The reproductive unit comprises one male and two females, with males taking most of the responsibility for incubating the eggs. By the time hatching occurs males may have lost condition, as their foraging is restricted to areas close to the nest.

The growth rate of juvenile magpie geese is among the fastest recorded for juvenile birds anywhere. This ensures that young are not stranded by receding floodwaters, but are able to move once they leave the nest, and follow resources as these become concentrated in areas of more permanent water across the floodplains.

Wild rice is an important food resource for the family group before and after hatching. The rice grains are held above the water column, and are easily accessed. As the water levels fall, corms of sedges such as *Eleocharis* spp. in the floodplain soil become available. Their bony face-plate allows magpie geese to dig for corms in the heavy floodplain soils, as soon as the water levels drop low enough for the soil to be reached.

Body condition declines markedly during the dry season as food resources become scarce and less accessible. However the early wet season rains provide a flush of new, highly nutritious growth, which helps prepare females for breeding that year, and provides energy for the movement back to breeding areas across the floodplain or into adjacent catchments.

References

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