



Fact Sheet 4



Australian magpies and magpie-larks: what's the difference?

Some confusion exists over the difference between Australian magpies and magpie-larks. Both species forage on the ground and they are both common around Australia. The confusion can be attributed mainly to their similar colouration although their common names can also be problematic.

Physical differences

With a little knowledge and experience it is easy to distinguish between these species. The table below outlines some of the physical differences that will help:

	<i>Australian magpie</i>	<i>Magpie-lark</i>
Size	Medium-sized 35-45 cm	Small 25-30 cm
Colouration of the head	Crown and forehead are black	Black head with white markings
Colouration of the tail	White, with a black band across the tip	White, with a black band before the tip
Bills	Black-tipped triangular bill	White bill
Eye	Red-brown eye-ring	White eye-ring
Nesting materials	Mostly sticks, sometimes with the addition of human-made materials such as wire	Mud nests, with grass and other plant material to hold it together

Common names

Both species have been known by many common names, leading to some confusion over which is which? In particular, the use of the name “piping shrike” to describe the Australian magpie in South Australia’s state badge has created misunderstanding. The table below contains many of the common names attributed to these two species:

<i>Australian magpie</i> (<i>Gymnorhina tibicen</i>)	<i>Magpie-lark</i> (<i>Grallina cyanoleuca</i>)
Piping shrike	Murray-magpie
Piping roller	Little magpie
Flute-bird	Peewee
Bell-magpie (also used to describe currowongs)	Peewit
White-backed magpie	Mudlark
Black-backed magpie	Australian magpie-lark

