



Fact Sheet 5



Bird watching and Australian magpies

Bird watching can be exciting, rewarding and a great way to spend time outdoors. There is a great diversity of birds and bird behaviours to observe. Bird watchers take great delight in spotting a species for the first time. It is also satisfying to work out new ways to identify birds; you might be able to see or hear birds, or there can be other clues to their presence such as tracks and nests.

Observing birds is easy. First, find a location where you want to bird watch, like a garden or a park. It is important that you are still and quiet so you don't disturb the birds you are watching. When you see a bird you'll want to identify what species of bird it is. Careful observation is the key and it is often useful to compare the bird with other birds you know. Pay particular attention to size, shape, colour and call:

- **Size:** what size is the bird and its bill, how long are its legs?
- **Shape:** is it tall or squat, has it got webbed feet, what shape is its bill?
- **Colour:** what colours and patterns are on its head, body, tail, legs and wings?
- **Call:** what sounds does the bird make?

Birds can often be identified by looking for a few distinguishing features. For example, an Australian magpie has a black band across the end of its tail, a black tip to its beak and a red-brown eye. No other Australian bird shares all of these characteristics.

Once you have observed a bird that you want to identify, you can look through a guide-book of birds to determine what species it is. It is a good idea to make a quick sketch of the bird, noting any distinguishing characteristics. It will also help to make a note of the location where you saw the bird and how it was behaving.

Bird calls, such as the tuneful warble of Australian magpie, can be used to identify birds. However, there are many calls and as a novice bird watcher it can be difficult to remember the calls and compare them to written descriptions in bird books. There are some audio recordings available to help.

If you want to improve your skills, it is a good idea to practise with an experienced bird watcher. Some basic equipment will help you see and identify birds, such as a good pair of binoculars and a bird field-guide. However, you don't need these items to participate in Operation Magpie. You can start by completing the online survey, downloading the Magpie Observation Form, then getting out to find some Australian magpies!

