

TAXON SUMMARY

Magpie Goose

1	Family	Anseranatidae
2	Scientific name	<i>Anseranas semipalmata</i> Latham, 1798
3	Common name	Magpie Goose
4	Conservation status	Least Concern

5 Reasons for listing

A range contraction to about a half of the species' historical extent could justify a listing of Near Threatened: a. However, movement of birds between Australia and New Guinea is substantial, with the Australian population probably the larger, so national status and global status are linked (as per Gärdenfors *et al.* 1999). Furthermore, despite significant threats, there is no evidence of a current decline, and so the species is Least Concern.

Australian population	Estimate	Reliability
Extent of occurrence	2,500,000 km ²	medium
trend	stable	high
Area of occupancy	100,000 km ²	low
trend	stable	medium
No. of breeding birds	4,000,000	low
trend	fluctuating	medium
No. of sub-populations	1	medium
Generation time	5 years	low
Global population share	>80 %	medium
Level of genetic exchange	medium	high

6 Intraspecific taxa

None described

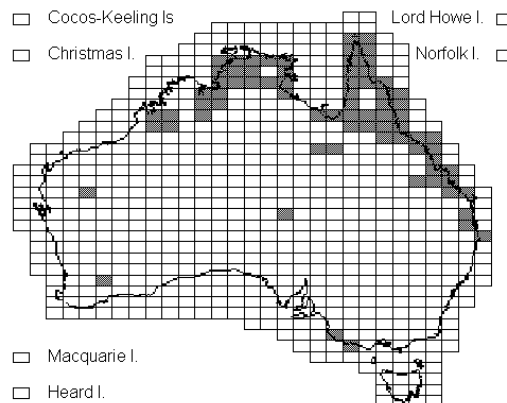
7 Past range and abundance

Across northern Australia and throughout eastern Australia including parts of western New South Wales (Smith *et al.* 1995), southern and western Victoria (Emison *et al.*, 1987) and south-east South Australia. Vagrant to south-west Australia and Tasmania (Marchant and Higgins, 1990). Also present in southern New Guinea and regularly crosses Torres Strait (Draffan *et al.*, 1983).

8 Present range and abundance

Natural populations extirpated from southern Australia by about 1920. Now confined to northern Australia, principally the Fitzroy R. and east Kimberley, W. A., northern Northern Territory, coastal Cape York Peninsula and patchily through eastern Queensland. Small numbers have returned to north-east New South Wales, and re-introduced successfully to Victoria, where populations expanding in south-west and on the Gippsland Plain, and South Australia (Marchant and Higgins, 1990, P. Menkhorst). Abundance in central eastern Queensland increased in

the last decade (Wilson, 1992, 1997). The largest population, in the Northern Territory, fluctuates greatly, probably in response to rainfall patterns (Whitehead *et al.*, 1992, Whitehead and Saalfeld, in press), but there is no evidence of an underlying decline (P. Whitehead). At Kakadu, it reaches 500,000 in dry season (Morton *et al.*, 1990), and total population may sometimes exceed 4,000,000 (Bayliss and Yeomans, 1990). Up to 3,000 near Rockhampton in late 1980s (Wilson, 1992), but no other published counts from Queensland. The Gulf of Carpentaria may separate the Queensland and Northern Territory populations, but there are anecdotal reports of birds banded in the Northern Territory being recovered on western Cape York Peninsula (P. Whitehead).



9 Ecology

Magpie Geese live in shallow swamps and associated grassland, feeding on seeds or tubers and green grass (Frith and Davies, 1961, Whitehead and Tschirner, 1992, Wilson, 1997). During the wet season, the geese usually nest in extensive colonies. They move hundreds of kilometres to perennial swamps in the dry season (Frith and Davies, 1961, Bayliss, 1989, Bayliss and Yeomans, 1990).

10 Threats

The initial decline in Magpie Goose numbers was probably the result of swamp drainage and hunting (Marchant and Higgins, 1990). The main threat now is invasion of breeding habitat by environmental weeds, principally Para Grass *Brachiaria mutica* and Giant Sensitive Weed *Mimosa pigra* and introduced ponded pasture plants such as the now-declared weed *Hymenachne amplexicaulis* (Marchant and Higgins, 1990, Wilson, 1997), which replace the principal food plants.

Hunting continues in the Northern Territory, on Cape York Peninsula and, probably, the Kimberley. However, in the Northern Territory, where monitoring has been undertaken, there is no evidence of a decline (Bayliss and Yeomans, 1990). Some Magpie Geese have died after the ingestion of lead shot (Harper and Hindmarsh, 1990, Whitehead and Tschirner, 1991). Breeding success on pastoral properties can be affected by fencing, but the scale of this effect is unknown (Whitehead and Turner, 1998).

11 Recommended actions

- 11.1 Monitor hunted populations to ensure exploitation is sustainable.
- 11.2 Encourage adoption of ANZECC policy on use of non-toxic shot for lead shot.
- 11.3 Support weed control programs in Magpie Goose habitat.
- 11.4 Examine the effect of pastoralism on Magpie Goose habitat, particularly in relation to weed abundance.

12 Bibliography

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