

TRACING THE ANTHROPOCENE

South Australian Museum

Susan Bruce



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BOWERBIRDS

Scientific name:
Ptilonorhynchidae



SONG

They are amazing mimics and show fantastic spatial awareness with their bower artistry, linked to particularly large brains.

DID YOU KNOW?

Male **Bowerbirds** decorate their bower differently, and each **bower** is unique. He will pick up and toss decorations in the air to attract visiting females.

A Male **Satin Bowerbird** collects blue, greenish blue to yellow objects; flowers, feathers, broken glass, crockery, plastic, berries. The male will grab an object in its beak and performs dance-like movements to attract a mate.

GREAT BOWERBIRD

Bowerbirds live in rainforests, shrublands and open forest areas.

EGGS

Their nests are shallow and made from twigs and foliage, and usually near the bower. They lay 1-3 eggs.

DIET

They mainly eat fruit but **Regent Bowerbirds** can feed on the nectar of silky oaks (*Grevillea robusta*).

PLUMAGE

Satin Bowerbirds can take up to seven years to gain their adult feathers (plumage).

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COCKATOOS

Scientific name:
Calyptorhynchus
Lathami

GLOSSY BLACK COCKATOO

Cockatoos are very large parrots. Their bills have **adapted** over time to allow them to eat large seed pods like banksia pods. It uses its left foot to hold the cones and extract the seeds.

EGGS

Glossy Black Cockatoos form strong pair bonds. They mainly nest in tree hollows – a tall sugar gum or South Australian blue gum or a dead tree. There is competition for the hollows - from other species like Galahs, little Corellas and feral Honeybees.

The Glossy Black Cockatoos lay a single egg inside a hollow on a layer of woodchips. She can only lay one clutch per year.

The female incubates the egg, but the male brings her daily food. Both parents care for the hatchlings for 90 days when the nestling is ready to leave the nest.

THREATS

Brushtail Possums, loss of sheoak feeding habitat and bushfire.



Above right: Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo
Scientific name: *Calyptorhynchus funereus*

DIET

The **Glossy Black Cockatoo** lives on sheoak seeds, found in one sheoak species on Kangaroo Island, South Australia. In the Eyre Peninsula in South Australia, the **Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo** eat the Aleppo pine seeds.

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EGRET

Scientific name:
Ardea alba



GREAT EGRET

An **Egret** is a water bird or a wading bird. They have long fine necks and long delicate legs. They wade in shallow waters; intertidal mud flats and salt marsh. Species of Egret include: the Great, Intermediate, Little, Cattle (Cattle Egret migrated to Australia via Asia) and Reef Egret.

DIET

Egrets eat fish, small crustaceans and insects.

EGGS

They have a clutch of 3-5 pale blue green eggs.

DID YOU KNOW?

Egrets nearly became extinct in Florida, USA because it was fashionable in the late 1800s for women to wear hats with bird feathers on top, and sometimes whole birds.

Aigrette is the French word for Egret, and it took four Egrets to make one hat.



Below: Egret feathers From the Ornithology Collection, South Australian Museum.



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EMUS

Scientific name:
Dromaius
Novaehollandiae



Image above left: A clutch of Emu eggs from the South Australian Museum's Ornithology Collection.

Image above right: Australian 50 cent coin showing Australian's Coat of Arms.

Image below left: Emu feathers from the South Australian Museum's Ornithology Collection.

Image bottom right: Emu feathers from the South Australian Museum's Ornithology Collection.

EMU

Emus are large **flightless birds** almost two metres tall, and they are Australia's largest bird. Emus have very powerful legs and 3 toes.

They are extremely fast, and can run up to 50 km an hour, which is the same as the car speed limit within suburban areas!

DIET

They eat insects such as grasshoppers, caterpillars, native fruits, berries, seeds, grasses and blossoms.

EGGS

They lay a clutch of 6-11 very large eggs, and incubation is done by the male.

Emus can be found all over Australia.

DID YOU KNOW?

Emus feature on Australia's Coat of Arms.

In 1932 Emus were gunned down because they were 'trampling wheat'. In Queensland they were culled as they were thought to be spreading prickly pear.

Today, they are still culled in Western Australia.

The Australian Lighthorse Units of the Australian Defence Force have worn a plume (an Emu feather) in their slouch hats since the late 19th Century.

In 1891 it was a sporting activity for men to ride their horses alongside an Emu and pluck the breast feathers from an Emu, and then place the feather in their hat!

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HONEYEATERS

Scientific name:
Anthochaera phrygia

REGENT HONEYEATER

In Australia **Honeyeaters** are major pollinators of many plant groups. Australia has many different species of Honeyeaters.

DIET

Honeyeaters are generally nectar-feeders but will also eat insects and fruit. They use social skills and usually cooperate to find food and water.

Honeyeaters and Parrots like to eat from eucalyptus and other bird adapted plants that contain lots of sugar and starch.

Smaller Honeyeaters can hover (like Hummingbirds) while collecting nectar. They can hang upside down when eating. They have a brush-tipped tongue, covered with bristles ready to soak up liquids.

NESTS

They build cup shaped nests lined with softer materials and the outside may include bark. They can be found in the fork of trees or branches.



The **Regent Honeyeater** is now listed as endangered in South Australia, critically endangered nationally, now locally extinct in Adelaide region and only found in the very Southeast of the state.

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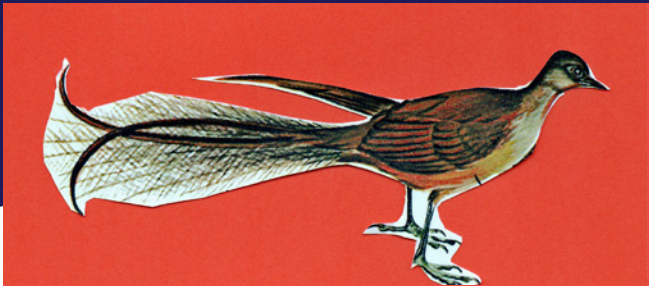
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LYREBIRDS

Scientific name:
Menura



Above image: Lyrebird tail feathers, South Australian Museum Ornithology Collection.

LYREBIRD

Lyrebirds go back millions of years. Australia had Lyrebirds and Logrunners before songbirds had even reached Southern Africa.

FOOD

They are ground dwelling, and find their food amongst the leaf litter. They eat insects, spiders, frogs and worms. They can shift 155 tonnes of soil per hectare when foraging for food, using their powerful claws to rake through the forest floor.

EGGS

The **Superb Lyrebird** takes two months to hatch it's **one egg per year!**

SONG

The Lyrebird uses sound as a way to attract a mate and to threaten off other males.

Lyrebirds are fantastic mimics, and when not in the wild can not only mimic other birds but also can copy sounds like – chainsaws, car alarms dogs barking and more.

Lyrebirds males can take nine months to grow complete tails.

DIG YOU KNOW?

What bird is on Australia's 10c coin? The coin that featured a male **Superb Lyrebird** was minted in 1966.

Lyrebird tails were also used in fashion on ladies hats, and in 1910 two dealers sold 1,298 Lyrebird tails.

There used to be a Lyrebird in the Adelaide Zoo called "Chook". He could imitate all the sounds of a building being constructed (at the time, the Panda home was being built).

Australia's early dancer and choreographer, Robert Helpmann used for his inspiration – the Lyrebird for his first work for the Australian Ballet Company.

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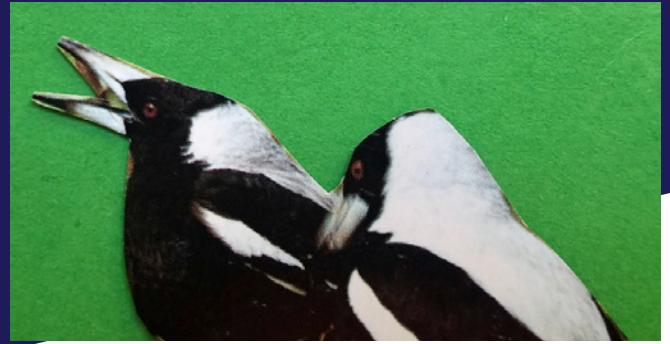
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MAGPIES

Scientific name:
Gymnorhina tibicen



AUSTRALIAN MAGPIE

The **Magpie** is one of Australia's most popular songbirds. Even though they have been known to cause serious injuries by swooping onto people during their breeding season, they are only warning people away from their nests.

They can be friendly if they like you, and they recognise people's faces.

DIET

They eat fat juicy worms and insects, and have amazing hearing, where they can hear a worm eating under the lawn, and they can then pierce the ground with their beaks to find the worm to eat.

EGGS

Australian Magpies hatch between 3-5 eggs that are often greenish/blue heavily marked brown eggs but are varied in colouration and patterning.

SONG

Magpies are known as a large songbirds, and are also very good mimics. Their morning call is known as "**carolling**", when they are marking out territories.



Image above: Australian Magpie eggs from the Ornithology Collection, South Australian Museum

DID YOU KNOW?

Young Magpies move in groups of 50 called "**tribes**" or "**tidings**".

Magpies can live up to 25 years, and they live in the same territory their whole lives.

The Piping Shrike, South Australia's bird emblem is really white-backed Magpie, or in Latin, a *Gymnorhina tibicen leuconota*.

In the 19th Century Magpies were captured and kept as pets because of their singing.

Magpies now thrive in the suburbs of Australia.

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PLOVERS

Scientific name:
Thinornis cucullatus



HOODED PLOVER

Plovers can range from the size of a hand to the size of a chicken. They are shore birds and can be seen running quickly along the beach. They can also be called **Dotterels**. They live on ocean beaches or nearby dunes.

They breed after rain and usually have long term partners, making a special call prior to mating.

FOOD

They eat small crustaceans, insects and sand hoppers.

EGGS

Their nests are flimsy – a small hole in the ground, made from pebbles, shells and seaweed, and they lay their eggs on the sand. Plovers lay between 2-4 eggs (depending on the species) and the male and female take turns sitting on the eggs, for about 30 days. It takes up to 4 days for 4 eggs to hatch.

The **Lapwing Plover** has been known to swoop humans in defence of their eggs, and they are saying “Please go away”.

Above centre: Masked Lapwing (larger Plover) eggs Ornithology Collection, South Australian Museum.
Above right: “Caution Ahead” sign for the protection of Hooded Plovers at Middleton Beach, South Australia.

The **Hooded Plovers** are classified as **vulnerable** in South Australian coastal areas. But there are now conservation efforts happening at various beaches, with signs explaining that they are nesting and is important to keep dogs away. Dogs and cats are their main predators.

They can also do a broken wing display which is intended to lure the person away from the nest.

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WRENS

Scientific name:
Malurus cyaneus

BLUE WREN

Male **Superb Fairy Wrens** have brilliant blue and black plumage, whereas the female is fawn brown. Males start off brown and go blue when they mature. During the mating season, males pluck yellow petals (the perfect contrast to their blue plumage) to offer them to female Fairy Wrens. They also do this outside the breeding season.

EGGS AND NESTS

Their nests are tightly packed dome shaped into shrubs, about metre above the ground, and is constructed by the female. She also incubates the eggs, but both parents feed their young. They lay a clutch of 3-4 matte white eggs, with reddish brown spots and they are incubated for 14 days.

SONG

Superb Fairy Wrens make high pitched calls and are highly intelligent. They sing a specific song to unhatched eggs during incubation. This serves as a sort of vocal pass code before they hatch. Then adults can identify their own young. The males sing when predators are nearby. Female Wrens also sing, and they sing to each other.



FOOD

They eat in social groups, and eat insects like grasshoppers, mostly in low bushes or on the ground.

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