

The Wing Markings of the Black-Backed Magpie (*Gymnorhina tibicen*)

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For a considerable time I was puzzled by the fact that apparently some birds carried a large boomerang-shaped white mark on the wings, while in others the white marking was represented by a narrow line only. At first I took the larger marking to be a sign of maturity, but soon noted that young birds carried it also. As no observer, as far as I know, has recorded the fact, I decided to make careful observations.

For many years (*vide The Emu*, vol. xxii., p. 149), when the winter has been severe, I have fed the wild birds near my office; but I now placed the feeding board right under my window, and about 20 feet away. During the present winter, one of the worst on record, Magpies have turned up in dozens, forty-five being present on one occasion. My trouble was soon rewarded by the solving of the problem.

Every bird, young and old, showed the large white marking (about 7 by 1½ inches) upon first alighting, but within a space of three to five minutes this was replaced by the thin line; in some cases hardly visible.

When on the ground, or perched, the black feathers of the back were gradually spread until they covered practically all the white wing-markings.

Gould depicts a bird showing the white markings and standing on a branch near the nest ("Birds of Australia," vol. ii., plate 46), where it had probably recently alighted. This is correct as far as it goes, but my idea is, seeing that the Magpie spends most of its time on the ground, the correct method of drawing should illustrate the thin band of white only.

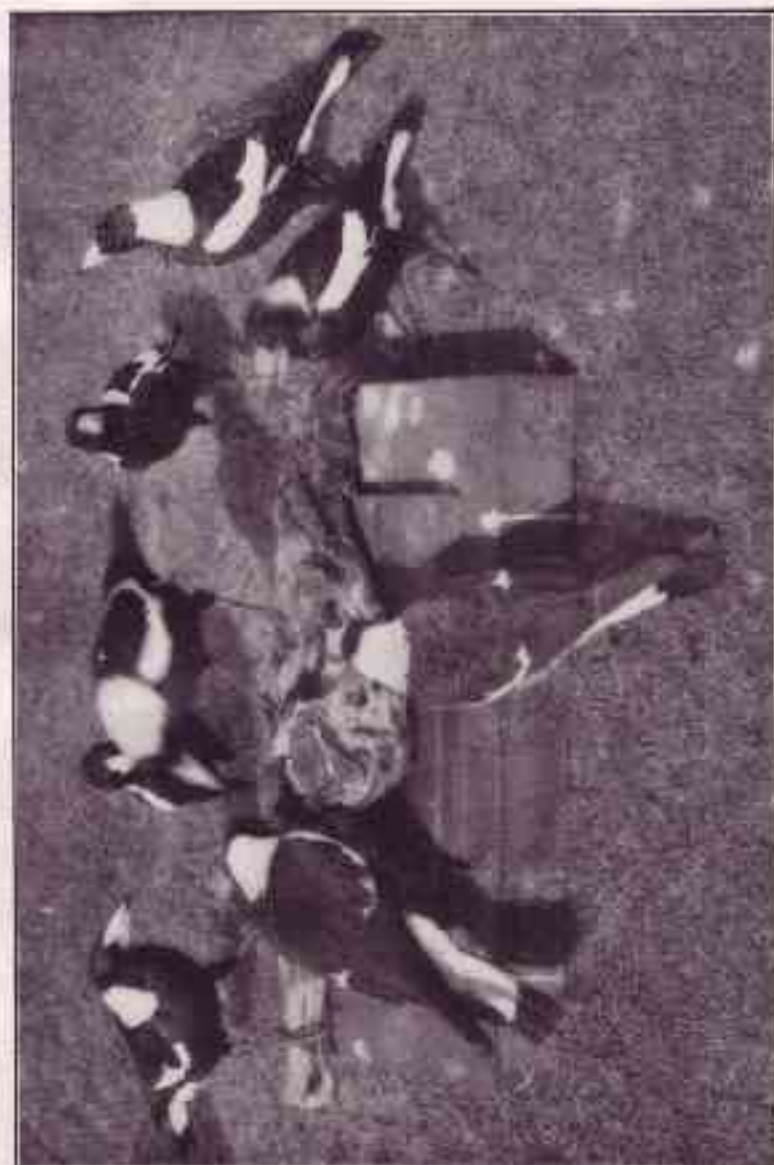
The accompanying photos. (see plates 2 and 3), taken from close to my office window, will illustrate my meaning; the two right hand birds in one of the pictures having just alighted, while others have been at the food for a longer period.

My wild birds now pick clean the neck bones of three bullocks per week, in addition to several livers. Amongst the regular guests is a fine bird showing no white neck patch.

As an illustration of how pushed the Magpies are for food, I notice they are eating quantities of seedling "trefoil," started by a recent light fall of rain.

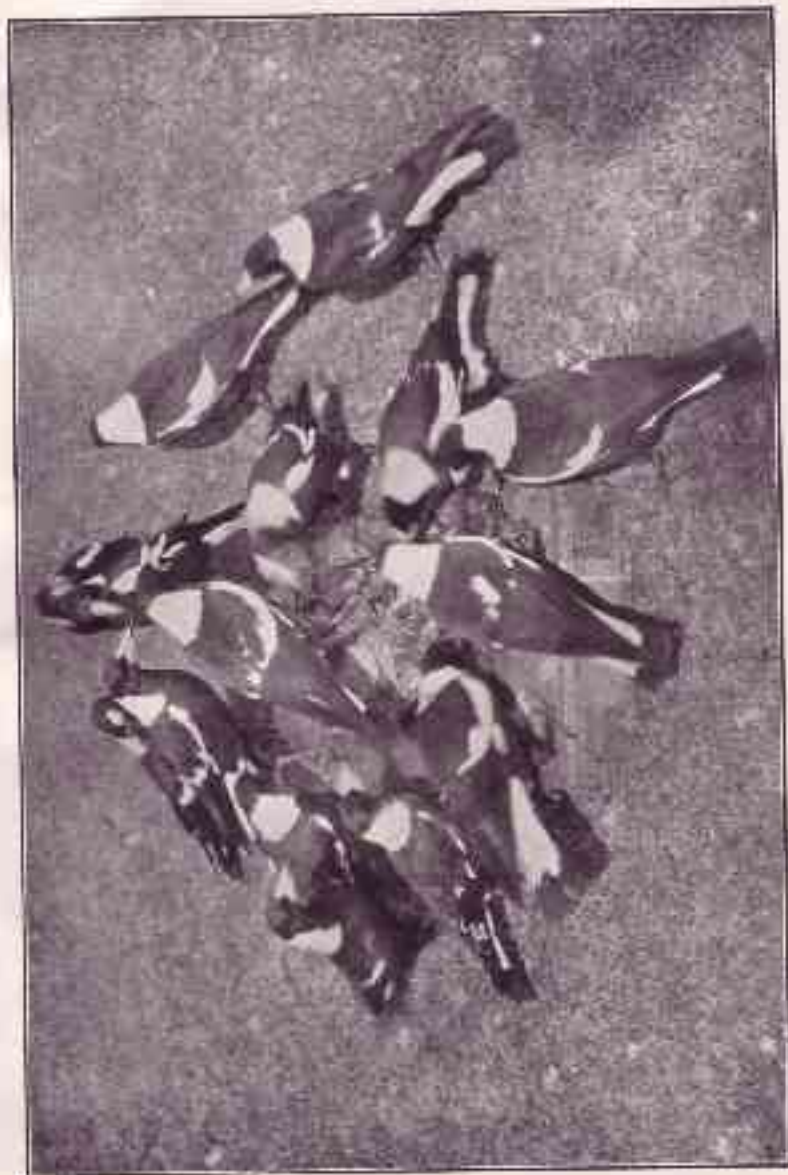
A friend at Singleton (60 miles away) has a fine pair of pure white Magpies in captivity; they have brown eyes, dark legs, and no trace whatever of black markings.

In Mathews' last part ("Birds of Australia," vol. x., pt. 5), is shown a very poor figure of *Gymnorhina tibicen*, taken from



Thick-backed Murrelets (*Gymuraea robusta*) being fed at Dellrose, Scores, N.S.W., April, 1922.
Note the variable amount of white on the wings.

Photo. by Sigsbee Jackson, F.R.S.



Wild Black-backed Macquies (*Gymnorhinus alcocki*) perched on the horizontal Bellfries, Soome, N.S.W.
Note the variable amount of white in the wings.

Photo. by H. W. Jackson, F.A.C.S., Bellfries, Soome, N.S.W.

the so-called sub-species *G. t. terra-reginae*. If this is the only illustration we are to have of one of our most popular and best-known birds, I do not think Mr. Mathews is to be complimented upon his selection of a type or upon the excellence of the drawing; the plate is unworthy of a great work.