

Bird Note

A second observation of an Australian Magpie feeding on pine seeds

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I wrote a short note in the mid-1990s (Paton 1996) documenting an Australian Magpie, *Gymnorhina tibicen*, feeding on the seeds of an introduced pine tree at Kooyonga Golf Course in the Adelaide suburb of Lockleys. The female bird took the seeds from the ground under the tree and from a pine cone on the ground and closed her bill on the hard part of the seed, leaving the seed wing attached to the outside of her bill, occasionally shaking her head to remove the wings. At that time there were no published records of Australian Magpies consuming pine seeds, nor does the Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds (Higgins, Peter and Cowling 2006) list any additional references. There is an unpublished observation, noted in Paton (1996), of an Australian Magpie eating the seeds of the Stone Pine, *Pinus pinea*, at Victor Harbor in 1966.

On 18 August 2016 when conducting the same survey of birds at Kooyonga Golf Course (now in its 26th year) and in the same area as the 1993 observation, I observed two adult male Australian Magpies on the ground. One bird was rolling a pine cone in its foot and then eating the pine seeds that fell out. The technique was different from the 1993 occurrence, in that the bird shook the seed in its bill to remove the wing before consuming the seed. The cone was about two-thirds open. This took place about 60-70 metres from the 1993 observation but probably involved the same pine tree, as the cone appeared

to have been carried a little distance from the only pine tree in the vicinity. The identity of the tree is unknown but may be a Corsican Pine, *P. nigra* or Aleppo Pine, *P. halepensis* (Paton 1996).

Paton (1996) postulated that the consumption of unusual food items may be learned and passed on from adults to young. I may have been more prescient than I thought, as it appears that this may be the case here, that the current generation of Australian Magpies have learnt from earlier generations that pine cones contain food and how to extract the food from the cones.

REFERENCES

Higgins, P.J., Peter, J.M. and Cowling, S.J. (eds). 2006. *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic birds. Volume 7A: Boatbill to larks*. Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

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