

# Feather Fascination!

with local Birdwatcher,  
Jim Butler



## BEST SINGER

The last 10 years have been extremely exciting for anyone interested in the evolution of the world's 5800 species of Songbirds. There has been a dramatic upending of our understanding of where they first evolved on the globe. The most recent evidence has demonstrated the very special relationship between our Australian continent and the world's Songbirds. Just as we say the cradle of Homo sapiens is Africa, similarly the cradle of Songbirds is Australia.

The story told and taught for the last 200 years was that the Songbirds originated in the northern hemisphere and radiated out over the globe and eventually came to Australia. There was evidence in Australia from the 70s and 80s that this story was not correct and our scholars contested the primacy of the northern hemisphere in the evolution of Songbirds. In 2004 an American scientific journal article, reported widely in the world press, concluded that the Songbirds originated around 100 million years ago in the parts of Gondwana that are now our Australian continent. The songbirds radiated out from Australia into the northern hemisphere and the remainder of the world.

Australia's present Songbirds therefore are the direct descendants of the world's original Songbirds. To celebrate their newly discovered evolutionary eminence I would like to co-nominate, with Judith Wright, the Australian

Magpie as Australia's best singer amongst our many Songbirds. Judith made her nomination in her poem "Magpies":

*But not one man that I have heard  
throws back his head in such a song  
of grace and praise-no man nor bird.  
Their greed is brief; their joy is long.  
For each is born with such a throat  
as thanks his God with every note.*

If you would like to support our Magpie nomination, or propose another bird for the honour, please email me with your comments and I will report back to you.

Happy songbirding

~ Jim

Contact Jim: [beautifulbirds@y7mail.com](mailto:beautifulbirds@y7mail.com)



Image: Singing Australian Magpie  
taken by Ed Frazer at Brookfield.