

A walk around the wetland – September 27. Leader: Simon Townsend

Darwin's rural area has a secret, it's the many lagoons that are readily seen flying into Darwin but hidden behind forests and beyond fences on the ground. Three DBC members on Sunday morning unveiled the secret of McMinns Lagoon, a public reserve in the Howard Springs area managed by volunteers.

At this time of year, the floodplains and many billabongs and lagoons have dried up. Those that remain "watered" are a haven for water birds, and home to water plants. McMinns Lagoon is such a place and did not disappoint.

Before seeing the lagoon, the calls of magpie geese could be heard. And sure enough, when the lagoon came into view about 1000 black and white geese could be seen – in all poses: standing, wings flapping, feeding with "bum up and head under-water", waddling awkwardly, flapping, and descending from the air.

The lagoon was a mosaic of open water, reeds, flowering white lilies, and birds; along the lagoon's edge, on the water, and amongst the reed. We saw: magpie geese and their small relative pygmy geese, shelducks and whistling ducks, egrets, glossy and white ibis, white necked and pied herons, jabirus and pelicans.

A flock of 20 spoonbills were busy feeding, moving along the shallows. Standing on water were the jacanas, and stalking the edges were stilts. And in the air, terns patrolled and kites surveyed. A few darters dried their wings in the sun.

The lagoon must have a lot of terrified fish! One heron had difficulty swallowing a fish which continued to fight on its journey down the throat of heron. The walk around the lagoon also revealed the brilliant blue of forest kingfishers. The amble took almost 2 hours, and included interludes into the fringing paperbark forest.

The deep squeaky honks of the magpie geese were with us all the time, accompanied though by tweets of pygmy geese and jacanas. For some time these were the only sounds of the lagoon, though a passing plane brought us back to rural Darwin. And now the secret is out, at least to us walkers but not the water birds of the Top End.

