

ANIMAL PEST CONTROL

ANIMAL PEST

The Magpie (*Gymnorhina tibicen hypoleuca* and *Gymnorhina tibicen*)

Introduction

There are two sub-species of magpie in New Zealand. The White-backed Magpie (*Gymnorhina tibicen hypoleuca*) and Black-backed Magpie (*Gymnorhina tibicen*). They were introduced from Australia in the 1860's to control pastoral insect pests. While the distribution of the two species is widespread, the White-backed Magpie is the most common in Hawke's Bay.

Description

Both magpie species are between 36-44cm long and are black and white in colour. The magpie has several calls but is most commonly associated with a peeling call in early morning, accurately described by poet Denis Glover as "quardle-oodle-ardle-wardle-doodle."



White-backed Magpie

Magpies are social birds and congregate in flocks. Mature breeding birds normally form separate groups from non-breeding birds. Breeding groups occupy limited areas of territory in which they gather food

and build nests. They aggressively defend this territory during the breeding season, which is from early July and through the summer months. Non-breeding flocks generally inhabit much larger areas and birds from this group will rapidly claim any breeding territory that becomes vacant.

What is the problem?

Magpies are competitive birds that establish distinct territories, usually at the expense of a number of other species. Magpies often drive other birds out of nesting sites and will readily feed on the eggs of other species. Magpies are also a threat to people, especially children. During the breeding season they will swoop at people, animals and other birds to drive them away from their territories. People have occasionally been injured in these attacks.

Magpies are intelligent birds, learning quickly from experience, so there is usually only one chance to capture or destroy a bird. This can make them very difficult to eradicate.

What can you do to control magpies? Distress Calling Tape and Shooting

Random shooting of magpies is unlikely to achieve any significant control and will result in the remaining birds becoming wary and difficult to eliminate.

For shooting to be most effective, also use a Magpie Distress Calling Tape. This is a recording of actual magpies in distress and when played will attract magpies from up to one kilometre away. This method should

be used sparingly however as surviving birds quickly become gun-shy and wary of distress tapes.

Place the tape player in an open area near the magpies preferred perching trees and within shooting range of cover.

Camouflage the tape player and locate it in an elevated position for better distribution of sound. Magpie or owl decoys set around the tape will give incoming magpies a visual target and make any wary birds less suspicious.

The shooter should be positioned below an established flight path and be camouflaged, preferably making use of natural cover. A .22 calibre magazine filled rifle (preferably fitted with a sound moderator), or a shotgun and cartridges loaded with No.6 shot, are suitable for shooting magpies.

Turn on the distress tape and quickly get into position. To avoid being detected remain motionless as magpies approach. Leave shot magpies lying near the tape as they will help to attract other birds.

Ensure you have a safe firing zone. A .22 bullet can travel up to 3 km.

Trapping

Suitable traps for catching magpies include the:

- Magpie Trip-Trap
- Larsen Trap
- Letterbox Trap
- Adapted possum cage traps

All these traps are live capture traps which allow for any non-target birds to be released unharmed.

It is important to note that under the Animal Welfare Act 1999 all set traps must be checked at least once every 24 hours.

Magpie traps are suitable for controlling low to medium infestations of magpies and are very effective when used during the breeding season.

Magpie Trip-Traps

The trip trap is a live capture trap and will capture two birds at a time in its twin compartments. Food is used to lure magpies into the trap, so no call bird is needed. The trip-plate trigger mechanism is easy to set and will catch Magpies and Mynah's.

Operating Trip-Traps

Trip traps should be placed where magpies are normally seen feeding or congregating. Ideal placements include open pasture near trees where magpies roost. Avoid paddocks holding livestock as curious animals may trigger or damage the trap.

Bait the trap with food such as butter, beef-dripping, mutton fat, bread, dog roll, cat food or mincemeat.

Keep human contact with the trap to a minimum to avoid Magpies becoming trap-shy. Dispose of captured birds during the evening or, if during the day, out of sight of the remaining magpies.

Magpies can be handled with bare hands, but for a start wear a light pair of gloves. For a quick and certain kill wring the magpie's neck with a sharp twist.

No call bird is needed. The exception to this is when the Magpies have no obvious feeding ground. Bait the trap as usual and in a nearby cage keep a captive magpie to attract other magpies down. Do not keep the call bird in the Magpie Trip-Trap, use a larger cage such as an old possum cage trap. Fit the cage with a perch, water container, rain protection and feed the Magpie with dog roll.



Farmer Mathew Matheson with a successful catch in a Trip-Trap. Note the generous dog roll bait.

When handling a live magpie, be careful of its talons and beak. While a nip from a magpie can be painful they rarely break skin. Wear heavy gardening gloves for extra protection.

Poisoning

Large populations of magpies, particularly non-breeding magpies, can be successfully and quickly controlled using narcotic Alphachloralose.

For more information see the Environment Topic 'Alphachloralose for Bird Control'.

What is the best time of year to control magpies?

Magpies can be controlled at any time of year.

What is the Regional Council doing?

Although the Regional Pest Management Strategy does not cover Magpies, a Biosecurity Officer can offer advice on magpie control options. They can also be contacted if you would like to borrow a Larsen trap or Magpie Distress Calling Tape.

For further information

For further information on animal pests or the Regional Pest Management Strategy, please contact the Biosecurity Animal Pest Officers at the Hawke's Bay Regional Council.

Wairoa	06 838 8527
Napier	06 835 9200
Waipukurau	06 858 8636
TOLL FREE	0800 108 838
www.hbrc.govt.nz	

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