



# Magpies

*Gymnorhina tibicen*



*Magpies were introduced from Australia in the 1860s. There are two subspecies, the white backed, which is the most common, and the black backed. The two interbreed and produce individuals with varying amounts of black and white.*

Magpies feed on a variety of insects, seeds and vegetable matter. They also rob the nests of smaller birds, taking eggs and nestlings. They are territorial and aggressive and are known to attack, kill, or drive off other birds, including native species. Nesting magpies may attack humans and can cause serious harm, especially to children.

Magpies are fairly large birds, generally 36–44cm in length and 280–340g in weight. They prefer open grasslands and cultivated paddocks with trees nearby for shelter and nesting. They live in family groups of up to 30 birds, usually building nests in tall trees.

## Control methods

Magpies learn very quickly, so there is usually only one chance to capture or destroy a bird. If an attempt fails, the magpie will be very difficult to get the second time round.

## Shooting

A tape recording of a magpie's distress call can be obtained to lure the birds into an area where they can be shot. A decoy such as another magpie can be used as a visual attraction.

You must have a licence before using a firearm. Use a gun with extreme care, especially where there are likely to be people or animals in the vicinity.

## Trapping (Larsen trap)

The Larsen trap, or live capture trap, is a cage with a spring-loaded door which is sprung by the bird when it enters. Alternatively, a possum cage trap can be modified to catch magpies.

Magpies can be attracted by prefeeding first with mutton fat outside the trap. A captured bird may also be used as a call bird by placing it in a compartment inside the trap to lure in other birds. A magpie put into another magpie's territory will certainly get the attention of the resident birds and lure them into the trap.

## Poisoning

Although the poison alphachloralose mixed with mutton fat can be used on magpies, inexperienced people should seek advice first because it is usually not the best method of control.

Alphachloralose renders birds unconscious so they can be easily killed. Any non-target species accidentally taking bait will recover if kept warm and can be released unharmed. Magpies should be prefed with non-toxic bait for about a week before any poison is used. Any uneaten poison bait should be removed and safely disposed of.

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