

Magpies

Gymnorhina species

PEST ANIMALS
EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY



Why are magpies a problem?

Attacks on people

Magpies can be very aggressive during their July to December breeding season. They defend their territory and young by swooping and attacking any animal, including humans. They usually attack people around the head and eyes. These attacks, especially on children, can be terrifying and dangerous.

How to minimise magpie attacks:

- Never deliberately provoke or harass a magpie. Throwing sticks and stones at them will make them more aggressive
- Avoid areas where magpies are swooping. An individual is usually only aggressive for a few weeks
- When entering a magpie territory, locate the bird and keep it under observation. If you are swooped upon walk away quickly – do not crouch, stop or run
- Protect yourself. Wear a hat or carry an umbrella to discourage attack
- Bike riders should dismount and walk through a magpie nesting territory

Harm to native wildlife

Magpies are known to harass and sometimes kill a variety of native and introduced birds. They also eat insects and lizards.

Large birds, such as kereru and tui, often become more noticeable when magpies are continually culled from an area.

Magpies have no natural predators in New Zealand and are thought to be increasing. Largescale control is expensive and reinvasion is constant. Control is best focused in areas where native birds feed or are likely to frequent.

It is illegal to sell, distribute or breed magpies.

How can I control magpies?

There are several magpie control methods you can use on your land.

Greater Wellington will control magpies if people are being attacked.

Shooting

In rural areas, magpies can be shot using a shotgun, .22 rim-fire rifle or a high-powered air rifle. To attract the birds, place magpie decoys in a paddock with a magpie distress call tape. When the distress tape is played, magpies will swoop on the decoys and may attack them. This allows you to get a close shot at them. Decoys and tapes work best during the breeding season. They can be purchased from sports or hunting supply shops.

Trapping

Magpies are inquisitive birds and can be lured into purpose-built cage

traps. There are two types of traps available, Multiple Catch Traps and Trip-Traps. In some situations, Greater Wellington will loan traps or they can be purchased from farm supply stores.

Multiple Catch Trap

The Multiple Catch Trap is a live capture trap. The trap has four catching compartments surrounding a call-bird compartment.

Magpies are lured into the trap by the call and presence of the live magpie in the call-bird compartment. Magpies operate in territories, so they are always interested in a new visitor.

Setting the Multiple Catch Trap

Two short wooden rods hold each door open and act as a collapsible perch. Place the wooden rods at the hinge end of the door on the wire mesh and onto the compartment's metal frame.

The rods should be set so they will collapse with the magpie's weight – about 350g. The doors are spring-loaded and will slam shut when the perch collapses, pushing the bird into the compartment.

Magpie Trip-Trap

The Trip-Trap® is smaller than the Multiple Catch Trap. It has two catching compartments. Magpies are lured into the compartments by fatty meat baits.

The magpies may find the trap more attractive if you put a mirror between the two compartments. Once inside a compartment, the magpie stands on a trigger plate, which releases the door.

Baiting traps

Baits can be used instead of, or in addition to, a live call-bird. Use fatty meats, such as dog roll, mincemeat or mutton flaps. Put most of the bait inside each compartment, a small amount around the outside of the trap or hang on the underside of the trap door.

Caution: meat baits may also attract animals such as cats. Cats can be released unharmed, but they may deter magpies from visiting the trap.

Where to put traps

Place traps where magpies feed or frequent. Ideally, they should be set-up in an open space where magpies can easily see it. Shelter the trap from



Multiple catch trap

the wind and position it where people, pets and stock can't interfere with it. Place the trap on private land away from public view and access.

Checking traps

The trap must be checked at least once a day. Check the trap at the end of the day so birds are not left overnight without food or water.

Magpie disposal

You must remove and dispose of any magpies caught in a quick and humane way. Be careful not to fully open the trap door until you have a firm grasp of the magpie, otherwise it may escape.

It is important to dispose of the magpie away from the trap or other magpies may be deterred from visiting.

A requirement of using the trap is the removal and disposal of any magpies you catch. Reach in and grab the magpie (preferably across its back) and strike its head with a strong blow using a length of timber or pipe. Alternatively, strike the magpie's head against a hard object.

A lot of force is required to ensure the bird is killed instantly. Check the bird is dead by touching the eyeball. If the eyelid does not move, the bird is dead.



Multiple catch trap trigger



Magpie Trip-Trap®

Caring for the call bird

To ensure the call bird survives, you must feed it daily with fatty meat, such as dog roll or mincemeat, and give it fresh water. These birds will not survive on bread as it does not have the nourishment they require. Do not use the trap in bad weather.

Magpie feathers are not waterproof and the birds can die from cold and stress. In cold, wet or windy conditions, cover the trap with a tarpaulin or place it under shelter to protect the call bird. Cover the trap at night.

Where did magpies come from?

Two subspecies of magpie (white-backed *Gymnorhina hypoleuca* and black-backed *Gymnorhina tibicen*) were introduced from Australia in the 1860s to control pastoral insect pests.

Wellington was one of the first liberation sites. White-backed magpies now predominate.

Habitat

Magpies live throughout urban and rural areas in the Wellington region. Their preferred habitat is open grassland and cultivated paddocks, city parks and playing fields, and the edges of native and exotic forests.

Food

Magpies eat:

- Invertebrates, including crickets, spiders, ants, flies and snails
- Seeds and grains
- Eggs, chicks and small birds
- Lizards, mice
- Sick or dead sheep and lambs

Breeding

Magpies can live for up to 14 years. They usually nest high in trees, such as pines, macrocarpas or eucalyptus. Nesting occurs between June and November.

Females rarely breed successfully before they are three years old. They lay clutches of two to five eggs, coloured grey blue, with reddish brown speckles.

It is an offence under the Animal Welfare Act (1999) to cause unnecessary or unreasonable suffering or distress to an animal. Greater Wellington will only lend traps to people who are prepared to take responsibility for the humane treatment of the call-bird and humane disposal of any trapped magpies

Water, air, earth and energy – elements in Greater Wellington’s logo that combine to create and sustain life. Greater Wellington promotes **Quality for Life** by ensuring our environment is protected while meeting the economic, social and cultural needs of the community

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