

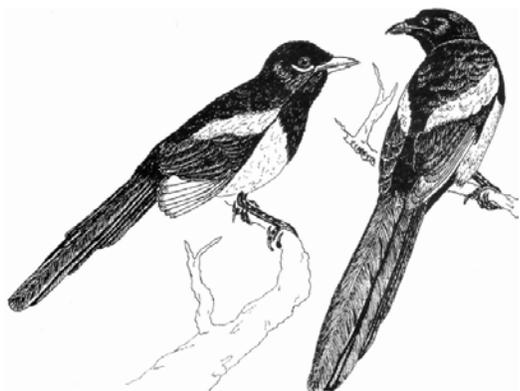
BIOLOGY, LEGAL STATUS, CONTROL MATERIALS AND DIRECTIONS FOR USE

Magpies

Black-billed Magpie, *Pica pica*

Yellow-billed Magpie, *Pica nuttalli*

Family: Corvidae



Introduction: A common and very conspicuous bird of western North America. Magpies are known as scavengers, predators and pest-destroyers. Their behavior makes them appear challenging, almost arrogant. With their noisy chattering, black-and-white plumage and long tail the magpie is very distinctive and thus easy to identify. Seen close-up its black plumage has a colorful hue with a purplish-blue iridescent sheen to the wing feathers, and a green gloss to the tail. Non-breeding birds will gather together in flocks.

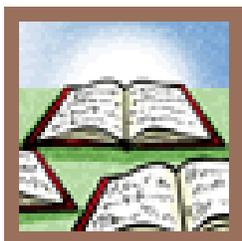


Identification: Black-billed magpies are medium-sized, with very bold patterning. Adults are largely black, with contrasting white stripes, a white belly, iridescent metallic blue-green wings and tail, and large white markings on primaries which form a white patch on the wings when wing is extended. The tail is long, narrows to tip. Black beak and dark legs. Size 16 - 19 inches. Small body but long tail makes bird appear fairly large.

The yellow-billed magpie is nearly identical, except it has a yellow bill, yellow skin around the eye, and is slightly larger. It lives only in a small area in California. Further information is available at:

[Cornell Lab of Ornithology](#)

[The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds](#)



Legal Status: Magpies are classed as migratory nongame birds in the [U.S. Code of Federal Regulations](#). A federal permit is not required to control magpies when they

are found committing or about to commit depredations upon ornamental or shade trees, agricultural crops, livestock or wildlife, or when concentrated in such numbers and manner as to constitute a health hazard or other nuisance.

Remember to always consult with state and local authorities before taking magpies.



Damage: Almonds, walnuts, olives, melons, grapes, peaches, figs, poultry eggs, milo, corn, barley, wheat, potatoes, and enlargement of open cuts and wounds of livestock.



Range: Black-billed magpies are found east of the Sierra summit and as far west as Shasta Valley in northeastern California. Yellow-billed magpies occupy the Central Valley and adjacent foothills, and the valleys in the Coast Range from San Francisco Bay to Santa Barbara County. Both species are permanent residents except for occasional local movement within the range.

[Black-billed Magpie](#)

[Yellow-billed Magpie](#)



Habitat: Open forests of foothills, riparian woodlands, oak groves, agricultural lands, parks, and urban areas.



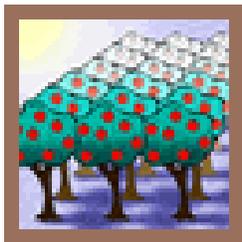
Biology: Black-billed magpies build a large nest on the ground near a stream or in a bush or low tree, often nesting in a scattered colony. The yellow-billed magpie builds a smaller nest resembling a large clump of mistletoe, sometimes in loose colonies like the black-bill, but nests are closer together and almost always far out on a limb of a tree, rarely in bushes or low trees. Four to eight eggs are laid, usually five

to seven.

The incubation period for the black-billed magpie is 16 to 18 days and the young are able to fly in another 22 to 27 days. This information is not known for the yellow-billed magpie but is presumed to be similar.

The black-billed magpie eats more than 80 percent animal matter, and prefers insects, etc., to fruit or grain; eggs and nestlings of other birds are taken occasionally. The yellow-billed magpie's diet is about 70 percent animal matter, including large insects, carrion, and bird eggs. Most of the damage to poultry and to wild birds occurs during the nesting season. The 30 percent which is vegetable food includes nuts and fruits as well as acorns and other natural foods.

The yellow-bill has been charged with attacking fresh shearing cuts on sheep, and branding wounds on sheep and cattle. Yellow-bills are gregarious. After the breeding season, they gather at night to roost in flocks of 50 or more.



Damage Prevention and Control Methods

Exclusion: Exclusion is generally not feasible to protect crops from magpies, unless the crops are of high value or the area to be protected is relatively small. Plastic or nylon mesh type netting can be used to cover crops. However, this can be time consuming, labor intensive, and can become uneconomical. Netting is useful in small areas or for individual tree protection.

Where economically viable exclusion is useful to protect magpies from accessing poultry nests and young; lambs (eye pecking); or where livestock have open wounds or disease and need temporary protection.

Habitat Modification: Magpies can become problematic during their own breeding season, and may increase predation on poultry. Nest removal can assist. However, only remove empty nests to ensure legal compliance.

Clearing low brush to reduce nesting areas and thinning or removing roost trees is also effective.

Frightening: Frightening devices may help reduce magpie problems. An integrated management program (IPM) approach is most successful involving a combination of human presence, scarecrows, pyrotechnics (fireworks), and propane cannons. Cost considerations for each of these methods need to be assessed. Success can vary greatly depending on specific locations, food availability, and how the technique is used.



Frightening devices such as scarecrows, effigies, eye balloons, hawk kites, and Mylar tape have been used to haze magpies. Most of these are effective short term only. Frequent movement aids in these devices effectiveness.

Repellents: No effective chemical repellents are available for magpies.

Shooting: Shooting will reduce the number of birds, but is costly. Effective reduction of populations may be prevented by the wary nature of magpies.

Toxic Bait: None are registered.

Trapping: A circular funnel design trap has been successful in trapping magpies in Canada. The best place to set the trap is where magpies congregate or near their flyways. Prebait for several days with meat scraps, small dead animals, etc. Place the trap in close proximity to prebait allowing birds to become accustomed to the trap. Allow a one or two day period of successful prebaiting before placing the trap over bait. Stake down the trap. Position bait in front of the inner end of the tunnel, well away from the trap's outer wall.

If after several days, no results are obtained, the trap should be moved and the above procedures repeated. Best results can be obtained if the trap has a "weathered" or old appearance, as magpies are suspicious of shiny material.

REFERENCES AND ADDITIONAL READING

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