

Magpies

Gymnorhina tibicen

Magpies were introduced in 1864, and now occupy most parts of the country.

There are two species – the black-backed and white-backed magpie. In the Bay of Plenty, the white-backed magpie is the most common. Approximately 420 mm long, they have a black and white plumage, black below and mainly white above, except for a black head and black outer third of tail.

Magpies are noted for their aggressive nature towards other birds and people.

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, 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.

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.



Control options

Shooting and use of distress tapes

Random shooting of magpies is unlikely to achieve any significant control of the local population, and will result in the remaining birds becoming wary and difficult to eliminate. For shooting to be most effective, use a Magpie Distress Call. 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 calls. When using distress calls, place the audio device in an open area near preferred perching trees and within shooting range of cover.

Camouflage the audio device and locate it in an elevated position for better distribution of sound. Magpie or owl decoys set around the tape player 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, and should make use of natural cover.

A .22 calibre magazine-fed rifle (preferably fitted with a sound-moderator), or a shotgun and cartridges loaded with No.6 shot, are suitable for shooting magpies.

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

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

Trapping

Suitable traps for catching magpies include the Larsen trap, the Arcane™ Magpie Trip-trap®, letterbox trap and adapted possum cage traps. All these traps are live capture traps which allow for any non-target birds to be released unharmed. Larsen traps

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

Effective use of live capture traps

Most modern live capture traps are cage traps with spring-loaded doors which close when the bird touches the treadle plate, although compartmental Larsens traps are still used with good effect.

Magpies are extremely inquisitive birds with a particular attraction to shiny objects and fatty foods, you can use this to your advantage when attempting to trap them. The use of shiny objects such as tin foil, or shiny metals can draw magpies to an area, mirrors on the inside of your trap will also attract a magpie or stimulate an aggressive response if they see their reflection, this often draws them inside a trap. Baiting a trap with food items such as dog food, lard, or fat trimmings can be effective at drawing magpies into cage traps.

Traps should be placed where animals are normally seen feeding or congregating. Ideal placement for traps include open pasture, particularly on common flight paths, or near trees where magpies roost. If using visual aids such as tin foil or mirror the traps need to be placed in a position where they can be easily seen from a distance. Avoid paddocks holding livestock as curious animals could trigger or damage the trap.

NOTE – According to the Animal Welfare Act.

Operating Larsen Traps

As described earlier, Larsens traps are compartmental live capture traps often containing more than 3 individual cages, they should be placed as you would any other cage trap, this is described in the previous section. Larsens traps are most effective when baited with a call-bird which draws other magpies into the trap.



Larsen Traps are very effective for magpie capture. This is a Leyden side-opening type.

Call birds must be well looked after as they are most effective when in good health. Ensure that there is an adequate daily supply of fresh water and food. Call birds fed on dog roll do well. Also ensure that the call bird has a perch and that at least part of the compartment is roofed. If bad weather is forecast, place the trap and call bird under shelter until the bad weather passes. Replace the call bird regularly with freshly caught birds as they can get quite tame after several days. Recently caught birds tend to be more restless and aggressive, and will be more likely to draw in other magpies.

Traps should be serviced once a day, preferably after dark. This is to avoid other magpies associating the trap with humans and danger.

To dispatch caught magpies, carefully open the trap door and grasp the bird over its back, then remove it from the trap. Strike the back of its head against the edge of the trap or a fence post. It takes a surprising amount of force to kill a magpie – do not be tentative!

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.

Catching 'Call' Birds

Observe the resident magpie population to determine where their feeding areas are. Set the trap in a feed area placing bait such as dripping in all the trap compartments. Also sprinkle smaller amounts of bait around the

trap. A mirror or tin-foil in the rear of each trap compartment will also help lure curious magpies.

A call bird caught from a flock other than the one being targeted will be treated as an intruder by the resident magpie population. Local magpies will try to drive it away and will enter catching compartments in their attempts to attack the intruder, thereby activating the trap. Locally caught call birds are also effective at attracting the attention of nearby magpies.

It may take several days to catch the first magpie, as they are likely to be initially wary of any strange object in their feeding area.

Poisoning

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

Because of the potential non-target impact, Alphachloralose operations are best performed by an experienced professional pest controller. If you wish to investigate this options please contact a Bay of Plenty Regional Council Lands Management Officer to discuss further.



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