



The Magpie: *Pica pica*

Description

Magpies are native birds, members of the Crow Family. They have a varied diet and will predate other birds.

They are found in many habitats - woodland, farmland, moor land, parks and gardens - though they prefer grassland with thick hedges or scattered trees. They have adapted well to urban and suburban environments and can be seen right into the centres of cities.



Life cycle

Magpies may breed from two years old if they have managed to secure a suitable territory (typically 5 hectares / 12 acres). Between 3 and 10 eggs are laid in April, and hatch after 18-19 days. The young leave the nest after approximately 1 month, and are supported by the parents for typically a further 4 weeks. Usually only one or two from each clutch of eggs survives the first year. They may live for up to 16 years. Whilst there is evidence that the number of magpies is increasing, it is estimated that the number of birds breeding has changed little.

Control Methods

Under annual *general licences* issued under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, by DEFRA, magpies may be killed or taken by *authorised persons*, using permitted methods, for the purposes of:

- preventing serious damage to agricultural crops or livestock
- preserving public health/air safety
- conserving wild birds.

For more details of current *general licences* see:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/general-licences-for-wildlife-management>

An *authorised person* is a landowner or occupier, or someone acting with the landowners or occupiers permission. It is not permissible to kill birds for sport, or for any other reason.

Acceptable control methods include the use of a wire cage trap with a spring-loaded door, designed to catch the bird alive (sometimes referred to as a Larson Trap). It can be baited with food, or with a live decoy magpie. This is legal as long as the decoy bird is humanely treated and given food and water daily. The trap must be checked regularly, at least every 24 hrs. Any magpie or crow caught may be humanely destroyed. Any non-target species accidentally caught must be released.

Magpies may be shot, again only by a landowner or someone acting with the landowners permission, for the purposes outlined above. Shooting must be well away from public roads and houses, so is seldom possible in urban areas.

It is also legal to destroy a magpie nest, even if it is in use. However, old magpie nests are often used by protected species, such as long-eared owls in rural areas and blackbirds in suburban areas, so check very carefully first.

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Borough Council Pest Control

The Council's Pest Control Officers cannot assist with the control of magpies, nor can we recommend any other contractor.

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