

# Pest of the month

## Magpies

Black-backed and white-backed magpies were introduced from Australia in the 1860s to control farm pasture pests. Both sub-species have inter-bred and are now regarded as a single species. Like many other introduced species, the lack of natural predators has resulted in a rapid increase in their numbers.



*Magpie*

Their expansion in range and numbers throughout New Zealand has led to many anecdotal reports of this intelligent and territorial bird harassing, displacing and even killing smaller birds, particularly during the breeding season. A small number have also been known to attack humans walking, jogging or cycling by. However, results from a four-year study by Landcare Research scientists noted that while magpies do chase and sometimes kill other birds, they are less of a threat to native species than predators such as rats and mustelids. As magpie numbers increase, native birds become less conspicuous, but there is less impact on their numbers than previously thought. Intensive trapping can reduce magpie numbers and minimise these effects.

In Tasman District magpies are in an expansion phase, with the largest numbers in the intensively grazed areas adjoining St Arnaud, Tapawera and Wakefield, from where they are spreading into other areas. Since 2001, landowners have been encouraged to control the increasing numbers of magpies. They have been slow to colonise Golden Bay as a result of the local trapping programmes.

The Council's biosecurity officers lend traps and provide "call-birds" to attract wild birds to the trap. Interest by rural landowners in this programme has exceeded expectations and more than a thousand birds have been trapped over the last six years.

Biosecurity officers will continue to support this initiative. If you would like more information on trapping or to discuss trap or call-bird availability, please contact a biosecurity officer at Tasman District Council.

The Tasman-Nelson Regional Pest Management Strategy classifies magpies as a containment pest and the Council encourages owners and occupiers to control them in rural areas. It is illegal to sell, breed or distribute them.