AUSTRALIAN MAGPIE

Family Cracticidae
Species Gymnorhina tibicen
Common name Magpie
Status Introduced from Australia or possibly self-introduced
Abundance Common
Size 410 mm (cf sparrow 145 mm, Rook 450 mm)
Habitat A bird of the suburbs, parks and open countryside. Especially plentiful in areas of steep sheep country. Seldom in forests.
Worldwide range Australia
New Zealand range Throughout much of New Zealand but absent from Westland.
Discussion Two races of Magpie are found in New Zealand. They are the more
common White-backed Magpie (*G. t. hypoleuca*) (above) and the Black-backed Magpie (*G. t. tibicen*) (below).

**Description**

**Head and underparts** Black. **Nape and mantle** White. **Back** (Black-backed Magpie) black, (White-backed Magpie) white. **Wings** Black with conspicuous white patch on secondary feathers. **Uppertail and undertail** White but black tipped. **Bill** White with a black tip.

**Description – female birds and juveniles**

**Upperparts** The white areas of the male birds are grey coloured. **Underparts** On juvenile birds brownish-grey. **Bill** On juveniles brownish.

**Conspicuous features**

- Bold black and white colouring.
- Heavy white bill.

**Conspicuous characteristics**

- Birds feed on the ground in small parties of up to about 14 birds.
- Aggressive if intruders (including humans) approach a nest.

**Call** A chuckle of bell notes.

**Nest** A platform of twigs and grasses, the cup lined with fine grass or wool. Up to 4 green, olive-blotched eggs are laid.

**Where to find**

Common roadside rural bird. Not in old forests or alpine areas.

**General** Magpies are disliked by many who believe they plunder the nests of passerine birds. Observations of the plundering of Skylarks and Tui nests have been recorded. Conversely, though, they have been recorded doing environmental good in eating agricultural pests such as black field crickets, porina caterpillar and grass-grubs.