

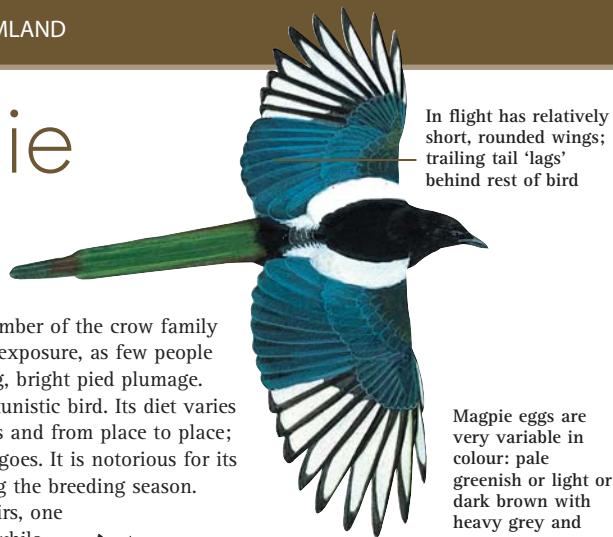


Magpie

Pica pica

Exremely easy to see and hear, this wide-spread, abundant member of the crow family perhaps suffers from over-exposure, as few people pause to admire its striking, bright pied plumage.

The Magpie is an opportunistic bird. Its diet varies widely through the seasons and from place to place; in fact, virtually anything goes. It is notorious for its skill at raiding nests during the breeding season. Frequently attacking in pairs, one bird distracts the parents, while the other sneaks into the unguarded nest to steal the eggs or helpless young.



In flight has relatively short, rounded wings; trailing tail 'lags' behind rest of bird



Flies with several quick wingbeats followed by glides



3.81 cm (1.5in)

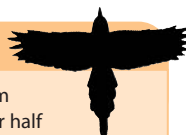
Magpie eggs are very variable in colour: pale greenish or light or dark brown with heavy grey and brown speckling

Bold black and white plumage is mix of iridescent colours when seen close up

Juvenile has much shorter, stumpy tail; duller plumage lacks high gloss of adults

Wings glossed blue; long tail green with purple towards tip

KEY FACTS



Length: 44-46cm (17.25-18in) over half of which is tail
Wingspan: 52-60cm (20.5-23.5in)
Weight: 180-270g (6.5-9.5oz)

Food & feeding: Wide range of food in diet; mainly invertebrates, grain, seeds and fruit; also some eggs, nestlings and (very occasionally) adults of small birds; carrion, refuse, scraps, at times frogs, snails and bread

Voice: Main calls are harsh, rapid, far-carrying *shak-shak-shak, shaka-shak-shaka* or *kyack*; also yelping, chirping and squawking calls; quieter, more musical babbling song is rarely heard

Nest: Large, domed outer structure of sticks with entrance near top, lined with internal bowl of mud and fine roots, high up in trees or in thorny bushes or dense hedgerows

Eggs: Usually 5 to 8
Incubation: 21-22 days, by female

Fledging: About 24 days

Broods: 1, rarely 2

Breeding season: March-June

Maturity: 2 years, some at 1 year

Present in Britain: All year

DISTRIBUTION

Movements: Occurs virtually throughout Britain and Ireland; absent from Scottish Highlands and the Hebrides, Orkney Islands and Shetland.



Population: Common and increasing, especially in urban areas; estimated 590,000 British and 320,000 Irish pairs.

Birder's Tip



In summer, a huge commotion from your garden's Blackbirds or Robins might be a sign that Magpies are attempting to attack a nest.

The usual victims are cup-nesting species such as Robins, Blackbirds and Song Thrushes.

In winter, you may see Magpies perching in the open for long periods at the tops of bare trees. This is the main way in which they announce ownership of an area because, unlike most birds, they have no territorial song to speak of.

Magpies feast on carrion and take advantage of any roadkill they come across.

