

## **8. Habits of the Black Billed Magpie**

Have you ever spotted a Black Billed Magpie in the wild? Perhaps you did and weren't sure what species of bird you were looking at. It is believed there are over 900 species of birds in North America and over 10,000 species of birds found throughout the world.

The Black Billed Magpie is one of only four North American songbirds whose tail makes up half or more of the total body. They are notable for their domed nests which may be more than 3 feet wide and take up to 40 days to construct. Black-billed Magpies were sometimes kept as cage birds, which isn't surprising when you see how beautiful these birds are!

Magpies have interesting feeding habits and feed by walking along the ground in search of insects, seeds, rodents, berries, nuts, and eggs. They are smart creatures that will hoard food when there is an excess and store it for later use. Many of us don't realize that other animals, and even humans, can benefit from this creature's feeding habits. People benefit from the cleanup service that these birds provide when they scavenge on garbage and carrion, or dead animals. They will land on large mammals or livestock and pick off wood ticks, providing a service to the animal.

When Lewis and Clark first encountered magpies in 1804 near Chamberlain, South Dakota, these birds were bold, entering tents to steal meat and taking food from the hand. Early settlers were often followed by Magpies, who would then feed on leftovers from their hunts.

Black Billed Magpies will display various behaviors to communicate. For example, they will sometimes display a fly-hopping behavior, which is a visual signal to other flock members to follow. They also perch in a treetop which signals to other birds that this is his territory.

This species was often targeted by farmers and ranchers which wanted to eliminate them as they thought they would hurt or kill cattle or smaller, sick, or weakened farm animals. Sometimes magpies would die from ingesting poison baits set out for predators. Luckily, Black Billed Magpies are once again common and widespread.

I enjoy bird watching, and these Magpies sure are fun birds to watch!

### **Sources:**

[http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Black-billed\\_Magpie/lifehistory](http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Black-billed_Magpie/lifehistory)

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<http://www.birds.cornell.edu/birdsleuth/modules/exploring-bird-behavior/bird-guide/black-billed-magpie>