



Ravens and Magpies

(*Corvus corax*) (*Pica pica*)

In Redberry Lake Biosphere Reserve

General information

Magpies and ravens are common and found everywhere in Redberry Lake Biosphere Reserve. They are both intelligent bird species, normally gregarious and curious, but can become shy and secretive in the presence of danger.

Magpies can mimic calls of other birds and can learn to imitate some human words. Ravens are cunning and can thrive in the harshest of environments. Both bird species have readily adapted to the presence of humans and have taken advantage of ample human-produced food sources. During the last couple of decades, populations of these birds have increased substantially in Saskatchewan. Ravens have expanded their range to the south.

Nest building typically begins in February for ravens and early March for black-billed magpies. Ravens lay 3-7 eggs and incubate them up to 21 days, and magpies lay 6-9 eggs that are incubated up to 18 days. Young ravens leave the nest after 4-5 weeks and magpies between 3-4 weeks after hatching.

Magpies are often found near livestock, where they primarily feed on dung and insects. They also forage for ticks and other insects on the backs of domestic animals, and pick at open wounds and scabs on the backs of livestock. This can increase the severity of the wound, and increase likelihood of infection. Both magpies and ravens may peck the eyes out of newborn or sick livestock. Damage may increase dramatically when the availability of natural food sources is poor.

Legislation

In Saskatchewan, ravens are protected under the Wildlife Act. This Act concerns all native species, with a few named exceptions. The magpie is no longer protected under the Act. This means that a permit is not required to remove magpies that are causing livestock, crop or other property damage. The province is considering eliminating the requirement of permits for agricultural producers and landowners, to allow for more timely control of ravens on private land.

What can I do?

Preparedness enhances the success in decreasing depredation. The cost of the different options for control should be weighed and compared with the success in controlling the problem.

Lambing or calving pens can reduce the incidence of eye pecking. Livestock with open wounds or diseases can be kept in areas that exclude these birds until they are healthy.

Scare tactics

A combination of human presence, scarecrows and pyrotechnics can be quite effective in reducing depredations to crops and livestock by birds. There are several frightening devices that can be used– see attached: *Bird Dispersal Techniques* (Booth, 1994), for more information on auditory and chemical frightening devices.

Scarecrows with painted eyes on both front and back of the head and arms made of flaps that blow in the wind, placed at regular intervals (one for every 2-10 acres) are quite effective. Eye-balloons, hawk kites, and mylar (reflective) tape are also efficient at deterring birds. Any of these is effective for a short time, which can be extended by relocating these devices regularly.

Magpies: Trapping or removal of nests

Removal of magpie nests early in the nesting season and clearing low brush may encourage them to re-nest in a completely new area. Note: Clearing brush reduces habitat for other wildlife as well.

Traps made of weathered materials are most successful in capturing magpies, but require a bit of time for birds to become accustomed to them. See attached figures from *Magpies* (Hall, 1994) for more information on trap types. Traps are most effective in areas of high concentration or along their flight paths into affected areas.

Sources

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Fig. 2. Modified Australian crow trap for magpies: a) entrance ladder (top view); b) side panel; c) top panel; d) end panel with door; and e) assembled trap.

Materials Needed:

- 28 8 foot, 2 x 2-inch boards
Cut these into:
12, 8 feet; 10, 6 feet; 4, 4 feet; 4, 34 inches; 6,
30 inches; 2, 22 inches; 17, 12 inches
- 1 8 foot, 1 x 6-inch board
- 56 feet of 4-foot-high, 1 x 2-inch wire mesh
- 24 4 1/2 inch bolts with wing nuts and 2
washers
- 2 small door hinges
- 1 door hook latch or locking style
- 3 1/2 inch nails, staples, haywire

Assembly Instructions:

Construct the entrance ladder. Cover both ends with wire-mesh pieces 7 x 16 inches. Make two side, top, and end panels. One end panel is constructed with a support beam in the center (as pictured in the assembled trap) and the other with a door. Cut and tightly staple wire mesh to the inside walls. Cut or file any sharp projections that will protrude into the cage. Assemble the trap, holding it together with baling wire. Drill 10 holes in the end panels (shown in d) and through the adjacent panels. Put bolts through these holes with washers on both sides and secure with wing nuts. The side panels and entrance ladder can be snugly held to the top panels with haywire or bolts.

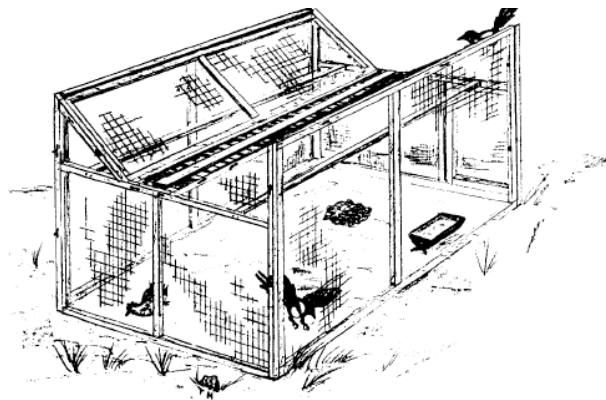
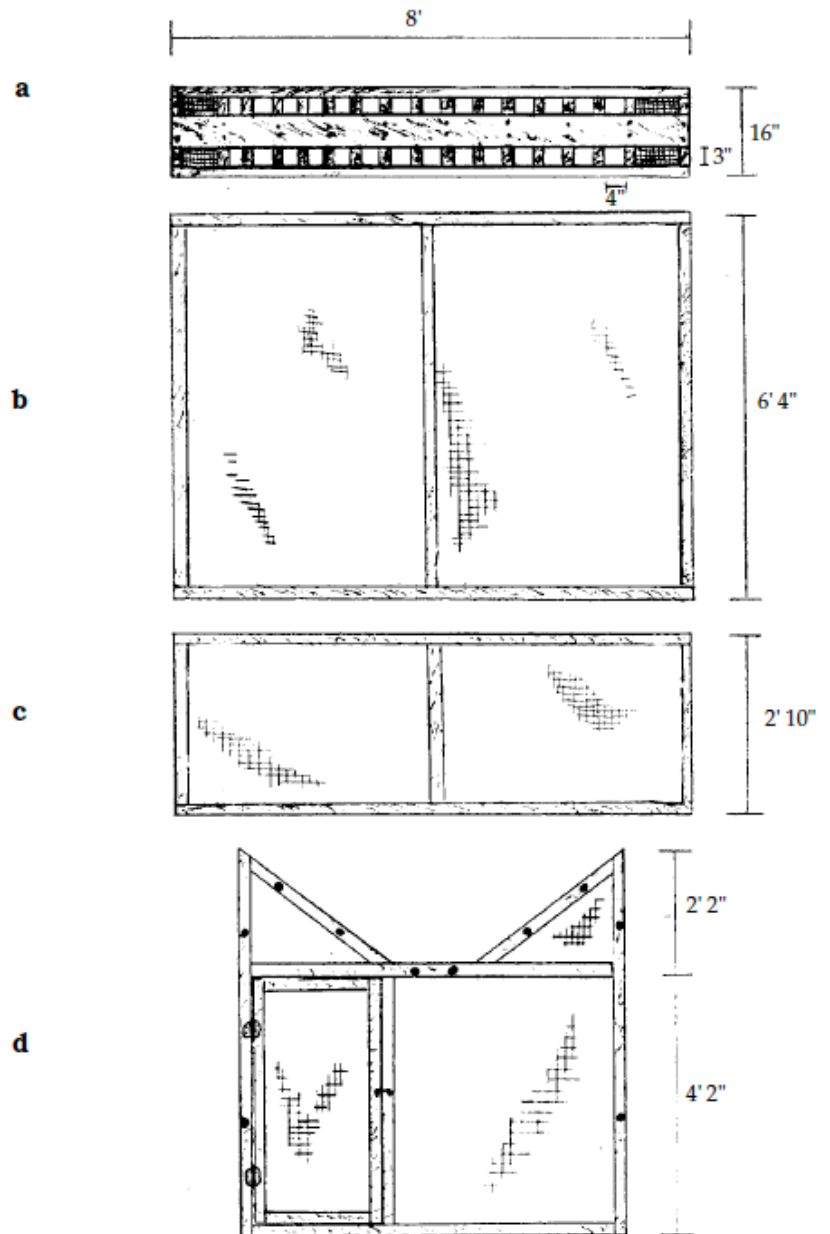


Fig. 3. Circular-funnel magpie trap:
 a) assembled trap; b) wire mesh cut for funnel; c) shaped funnel.

Materials Needed:

- 1 1/4-inch reinforcing rod 12 2/3 feet long
- 1 2 foot 6 inches x 12 foot 8 inches piece of 1-inch welded-wire mesh
- 2 2 foot 6 inches x 4 foot wire mesh (cut to fit top)
- 1 2 foot 6 inches x 3 foot 6 inches wire mesh (cut and tapered for funnel)
- 3 stakes about 10 inches long with 'U-shaped' heads

Assembly Instructions:

Bend the 1/4-inch rod in a circle and weld. Attach the 12-foot 8-inch wire mesh piece to the rod with haywire and crimp the ends of the wire mesh around the rod. Cut out the funnel, shape, and attach to the ground-side, inside wall with haywire. Cut out the wall according to the size of the tunnel opening. Cut out the rectangular opening (12 x 16 inches) on three sides opposite the funnel, but leave the fourth side as a hinge for a door to remove magpies. If light-gauge wire is used, an additional reinforcing rod around the top and on the sides may be needed to make the trap sturdy. Cut out the top and attach. Stake down the trap in the area to be trapped.

