

FINE FEATHERED FRIENDS...THE MAGPIES by Joan Mish

Since I am new to Colorado I have become enamored with those beautiful birds, the MAGPIES. They seem to be everywhere but especially on the bike trail. But I also saw a couple or was it three in a tree outside my line.

They are a member of the crow family and live in a wide range from Western America, east to the plains, north to Alaska and in Winter can be seen as far east as Michigan and Illinois. I have lived in Michigan and Illinois and never have seen them before. They can be very noisy I understand. They imitate different sounds sometimes. They are not scared of living near human developments. And their long tails can make flights a little difficult in high wind. They eat chiefly on large insects but also small animals, fruits and grain.

Their nest can be 30 inches high and 20 inches wide. It can take up to 40 days to construct. The nest is built by both the male and female out of a big ball of twigs and mud. The inside is lined with roots, grasses and hair. The entrance is often concealed. They breed between March and July with 5-9 eggs. The male feeds the female while she is incubating (16-18 days) and they both share the feeding after that. These birds mate for life! The female initiates the pairing by begging for food from the male! The longest life has been documented as 9 years and 4 months in Idaho. The magpies do not migrate.

The magpie is highly intelligent and being one of the smartest birds in the world it uses this intelligence to steal, forage, and gather food. It is said that Lewis and Clark's tent was invaded by magpies.

Now for a couple of myths:

The Native American Has a folklore. When one is wearing a magpie feather it is a sign of fearlessness in some tribes as the magpie is bold and has little fear.¹ In South Dakota there is a myth that all the animals had a race to determine if the two legged animals had the right to eat the four legged ones or if it was the reverse. The bison was winning the race, but the magpie was sitting between his horns. As he got close to the finish line, the magpie burst forward and won. In many parts of Europe, the magpie is honored due to the fact it warns people of the approach of wolves and armed men.