

## Should I offer backyard magpies food?

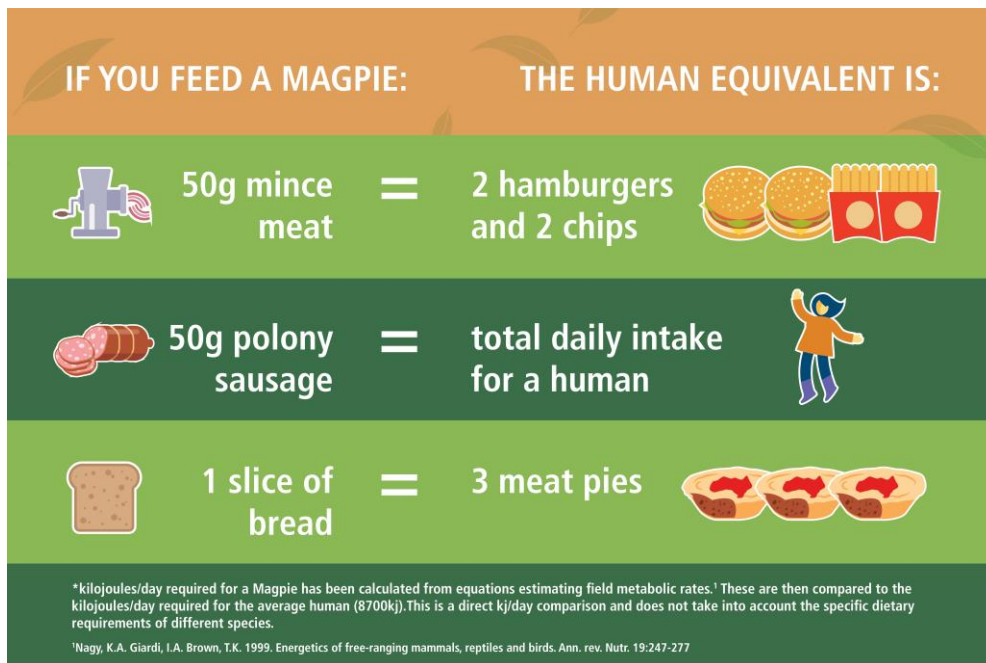
### Offering backyard magpies food is not recommended.

Magpies are frequent visitors to the urban backyard and are often encouraged with food. Magpies are also quite clever in asking for food with various cheeky methods, which increases our willingness to provide food. However, feeding human food can lead to **nutritional imbalances**, increase the risk of **disease** and lead to a disruption in natural **animal behaviour**.

### Nutritional imbalances

Human food is not natural for magpies and can make them **sick**. A natural diet for these birds consists of **insects** and **small animals** such as lizards and mice. Food sources commonly offered to magpies include bread, mincemeat, bird seed and pet food, all of which can lead to **nutritional imbalances** and **life threatening complications**.

Feeding magpies bread can cause stomach problems, raw meat and sausage lacks the calcium requirements of these birds and may lead to weak bones and beaks, and bird seed is only a minor part of the magpie diet. Magpies are also considerably smaller than humans so the amount of food supplied is often in excess of the required daily intake for these birds.





## Spread of disease

Feeding magpies (or any wildlife) raw meat can expose them to parasitic disease such as the potentially fatal parasite *Toxoplasma gondii*. In addition, regular feeding stations where numerous birds congregate to feed can increase the risk of disease transmission.

## Disrupting animal behaviour

A constant supply of 'easy' human food can disrupt the natural population density within an area. Magpies can out-compete many smaller birds for food and effectively force them out of the area. An increased population of magpies may also occur resulting in greater pressure on natural food sources.

## What can I do instead to help magpies living in my garden?

There are plenty of things you can do **to encourage** magpies in your area **without the risk of causing harm**.

- Ensure magpies are safe from pets on your property.
  - Keep cats indoors, or contained within an outdoor enclosure.
- **Avoid using plant and insect poisons**, which can be fatal to birds – either by eating the poison, or by eating poisoned bugs. Additionally, killing insects will remove a natural food source for these birds.

## Feeding magpies is not recommended. However, if you must feed them you should aim to minimise the risk of harm:

- Completely avoid unhealthy (and potentially life-threatening) foodstuffs such as **bread (and other baked goods) and processed meat**.
- Offer **very small portions** of safer foods, and **not everyday**.
  - **Mealworms are a preferred option for omnivorous birds** such as magpies.
  - If you are feeding **raw meat ensure that**:
    - it is high quality mince.
    - it has been frozen (-20°C) for at least three days to ensure ***Toxoplasma gondii*** is not transmitted.
  - you add additional sources of protein and calcium such as Insectivore or InsectaPro and calcium carbonate.
- Offer food in ways that minimises the risk of harm.
  - Offer food in elevated locations, to **avoid predation** by cats and foxes
  - Ensure the feeding station is routinely cleaned to prevent the **spread of disease**.

## Sources:

<sup>1</sup>Nagy, K.A., Girard, I.A., Brown, T.K. 1999. Energetics of free-ranging mammals, reptiles and birds. *Ann. Rev. Nutr.* 19: 247-277

