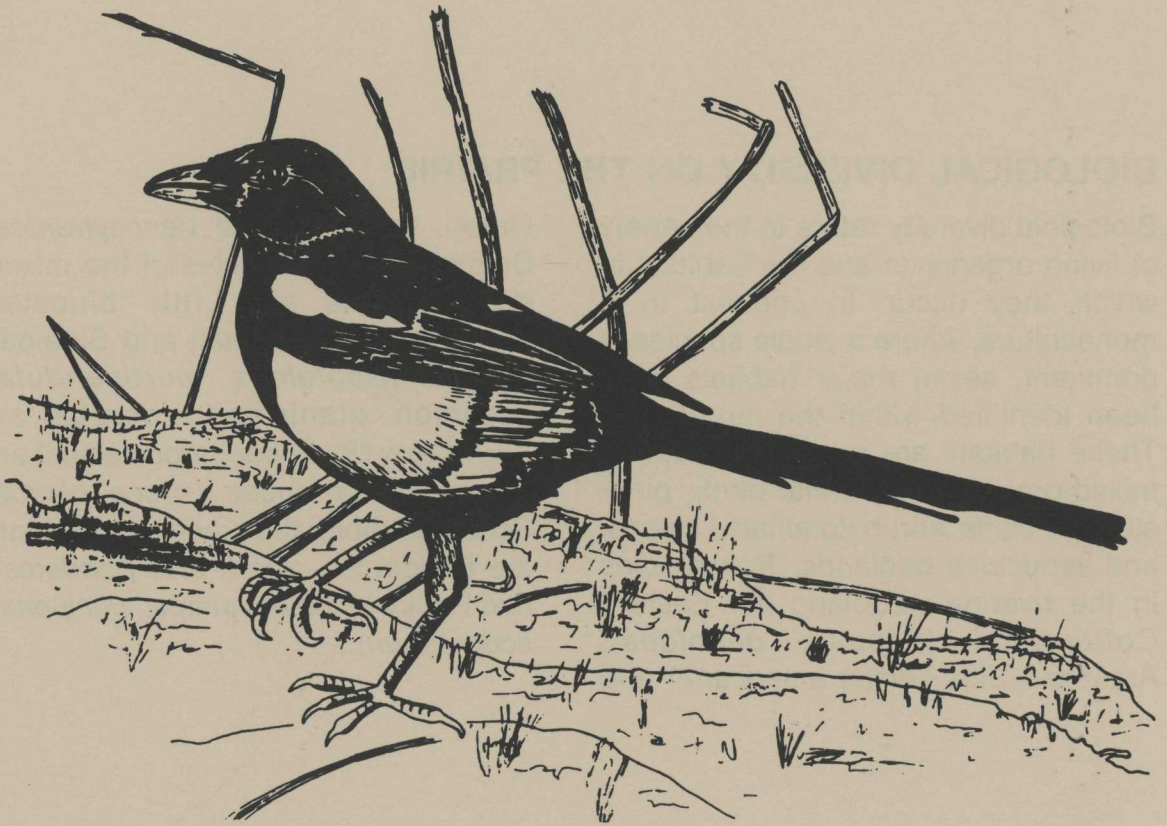


Scotts Bluff

BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE



A VARIETY OF WILDLIFE AND LANDSCAPES

Scotts Bluff National Monument is a unique historic landmark which preserves both cultural and natural resources. Sweeping from the river valley woodlands, to the mixed-grass prairie, to pine studded bluffs, Scotts

Bluff contains a wide variety of wildlife and landscapes. The 3,000 acres comprising Scotts Bluff conserves one of the last areas of the Great Plains which has not been significantly changed by human occupation.

BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY ON THE PRAIRIE

Biological diversity refers to the variety of living organisms and the habitats in which they occur. In contrast to a monoculture, where a single species is dominant, seven major habitats have been identified within the monument. These habitats are riverine woodland, mixed-grass prairie, canal bank, pine-studded bluffs, shrub dominated slopes, and sandstone badlands. Tree species in the riverine woodland are Eastern Cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*), American Elm (*Ulmus americana*) and

Green Ash (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica*). Dominant grass species of the mixed-grass prairie are Little bluestem (*Andropogon scoparius*) and Side-oats grama (*Bouteloua curtipendula*). Common plants and shrubs are Snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*) and Soapweed or Yucca (*Yucca glauca*). Scattered along the pine-studded bluffs are Ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*) and Rocky Mountain juniper (*Juniperous scopularum*).

Shrub dominated slopes are primarily covered with Skunkbush sumac (*Rhus aromatica*) and Rocky Mountain juniper. The major cover of depressions and drainages in the badlands are sedges (*Carex spp.*), Downy brome (*Bromus*

tectoum) and Rabbitbrush (*Chrysothamhus nausosus*). One hundred thirty-six different animal species are known to live within these diverse habitats.

BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE (*Pica pica*)

As emigrants crossed the western prairies, they found the numerous and wide-spread black-billed magpie. Referring to its noisy chattering, by giving it a female name, "Marguerite" (Maggie), and pie from the Latin "pica", meaning black and white, French fur traders named the magpie (Hoffman).

Long streaming tails, longer than their bodies, and white wing patches

characterize magpies. While often admired for its beauty, it was more often cursed. Lewis and Clark reported that magpies even entered their tents and stole food from their plates. Magpies followed the American Indians, feeding on scraps of food, and were often tamed by the children. They often followed the buffalo hunters and fed on the waste from the kill.

**National Monument
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior**

Adapted to grasslands, but requiring trees for nesting, the magpie is the most visible bird species at the monument. As you walk the trails of the prairie, you may find large masses of sticks in juniper and pine trees. These are magpie nests.

Magpies are omnivorous, meaning that they eat both plant and animal material. They are also opportunistic scavengers and play a major role in cleansing the environment of decaying carcasses which fulfills its "calling" as a sanitation engineer of the prairie.

However, magpies frequently launch relentless and vicious attacks on live animals. A park employee observed a magpie kill a healthy rabbit. The magpie repeatedly struck the back of the rabbit's neck with its heavy sharp beak. On another occasion, a magpie was observed defending its nest from a marauding Bull Snake. The magpie circled the snake repeatedly, and as the two animals faced each other, twisted the Bull Snake into a corkscrew, each animal striking out at the other at the most opportune moments.

