

AUSTRALIAN MAGPIE *Gymnorhina tibicen*

[SA] Miranda; 1 on 31/10 (DMS). [T] New Plymouth, 1 seen to fly down and catch and kill a Mouse; another report of 2 knocking Blackbird out of air and killing it on ground (WBM).

ROOK *Corvus frugilegus*

[SA] Maramarua; 20 flying over SH2 on 24/2, well W of usual range (DAL). [VP] Rotorua; 1 near Okere Falls on 22/11; Taihape/Napier Rd; 1 near Rangitikei R on 26/11 (KO). [T] New Plymouth; up to 4 on several occasions & 1 pr nesting (WVG, CLu, ALE et al).



## SHORT NOTE

### **Bird deaths from hip-chain cotton entanglement**

Hip-chain cotton is a fine durable cotton thread, attached to a meter worn at the user's hip, that is released behind the user when s/he walks from point A to point B. Managers and scientists commonly use hip-chain cotton to measure distances in forested areas. The cotton is often left in the forest after use, probably because it is believed to be biodegradable. However, some cotton rolls presently available (COTT30 & COTT50, Geo-Systems Limited) are mixed with polyester which does not break down within one year (KPB pers. obs.) and hence the cotton is capable of catching and killing birds over time.

A Morepork (*Ninox novaeseelandiae*) was entangled by hip-chain cotton and subsequently released alive at Kaharoa in central North Island, New Zealand, in January 1994 during an experiment that used approximately 3.3 km of cotton, over a 3 week period.

Similarly, at Maruia, South Island, New Zealand, hip-chain cotton was used at two sites to set up a bait station grid as part of a stoat control experiment for 3 months (September - November 1996). Approximately 20 km of cotton was used at Site A and 11.8 km at Site B. Feather and bone remains of a juvenile Robin (*Petroica australis*) were found entangled in cotton at Site A; and a live Blackbird (*Turdus merula*) and the wing of an adult Robin were found at Site B.

A request for information about bird entanglement in hip-chain cotton was sent by electronic mail to the 14 Department of Conservation conservancies throughout New Zealand and to Science and Research staff in Wellington on Tuesday 26 November 1996. The following records were provided:

A Little Shearwater (*Puffinus assimilis*) died from entanglement in hip-chain cotton on Coppermine Island during winter 1992 (R. Pierce pers. comm.).

A Morepork was released from hip-chain cotton in June 1996 at Lake Rotokura, Ohakune, North Island. Feather remains found subsequently suggest that the Morepork probably died soon after release (M. Wakelin pers. comm.).

A Magpie (*Gymnorhina tibicen*) and a Blackbird both died after entanglement in cotton at Boundary stream, Hawkes Bay, North Island, in 1996 (G. Walls pers. comm.).

It is unlikely that many species are affected at the population level by the use of hip-chain cotton as only a few individuals appear to become entangled and perish. However, unnecessary bird deaths are undesirable and cotton use around rare species could pose unacceptable risk. Cotton should be used only when necessary and should be removed as soon as is practicable rather than leaving it on site to decompose. Different techniques such as counting footsteps, measuring with a cord of known length, measuring wheels or GPS (Geographical Positioning System) equipment could be used instead of cotton. The careful use of hip chain cotton and the use of alternatives could greatly reduce risks to birds.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank N. Alterio, J. Innes, R. Keedwell, H. Moller and P. Sagar for commenting on this short note. We would also like to thank R. Pierce, G. Walls and M. Wakelin for replying to our E-mail request.

KEYWORDS: Hip-chain cotton, bird entanglement, bird mortality

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Manuscript received 27 March 1997, revised & accepted 15 May 1997