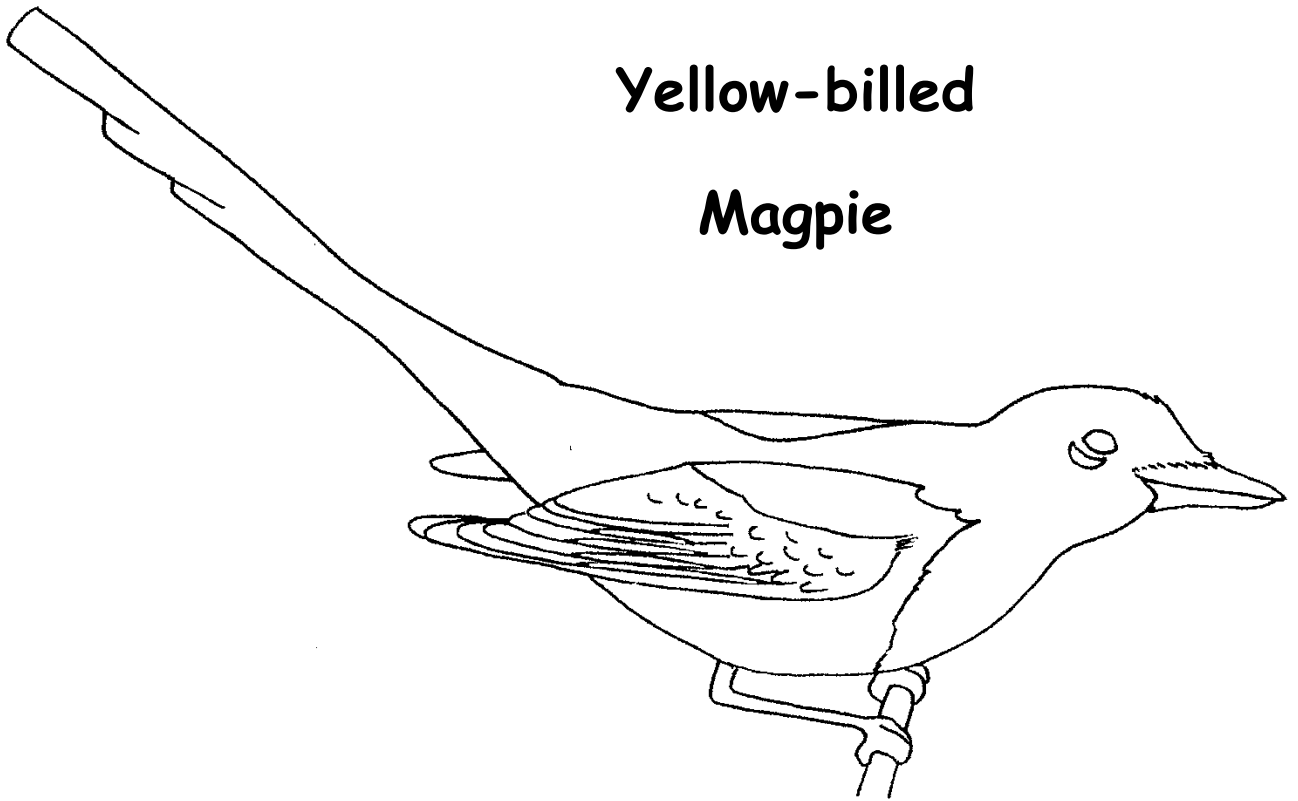


# Yellow-billed Magpie



## Coloring Instructions:

Yellow - the bill and the patch of skin below the eye

Black - the eye, head, throat, breast, back, rump, tail and the wings (except for the white shoulders and the white wing tips)

White - the belly, sides and shoulders

In good light, the black on the wings and tail will shine with iridescent green and blue.

# Yellow-billed Magpie

**Length:** 16"

**Habitat:** Resident in oak woodlands and farming areas

**Field marks:** Black and white bird with a very long tail and a bright yellow bill.

The handsome Yellow-billed Magpie occurs in small groups and is quite common in the farmlands of our region. The long tail and the flashy black and white pattern of the body are unmistakable. Watch closely and you will also be able to see the yellow bill mentioned in its name.

What is strange about this yellow-billed bird is that it's found only in or near the Central Valley of California. If you drive over the mountains to the north or east, you will see Black-billed Magpies. The Black-billed Magpie has a very large **range**. It occurs through most of the west and all the way up into Alaska. The Yellow-billed Magpie is found only here in the Central Valley.

What is even stranger is that the ranges of the two species do not overlap. The only obvious difference is the color of their bills. They eat similar foods. They both breed in small colonies and build large, domed nests of sticks and lay similar eggs. In both species, the males feed the females

while the female sits on the nest and both the mother and father help feed the young. Both species travel and roost in flocks during the winter.

And yet somehow the differences between them are important enough to keep their ranges from overlapping. Why doesn't the Yellow-billed Magpie expand its range into the area where the Black-billed Magpie lives? A similar question can be asked of every species. Since each species can live well where it's living, why can't it live where it isn't living?

The Black-billed Magpie winters in areas much colder than the Central Valley. Maybe the Yellow-billed Magpie could not survive in those areas. Also, the two magpie species have different courtship displays. Perhaps that keeps the two species from interbreeding.

Rarely are the boundaries of a bird's range obvious. When you travel, you will always be moving out of the range of some birds and into the ranges of other birds. There is a middle range boundary in the middle of the United States, not only for birds, but for plants, insects and mammals as well.

There are many species of birds that live in eastern North America, such as the Blue Jay, that do not live in the west. There are many species of birds around us here in western North America, such as the two magpie species, that are never seen in the east. Learning about the birds around you helps you learn about your region.

# Yellow-billed Magpie Challenges

Put a check mark in the box when you have completed the challenge.

- Identify a Yellow-billed Magpie. The males and the females look alike.
- See that the black wing and tail feathers are iridescent.
- See a magpie's very large, domed stick nest high in the top of a tree.
- Hear their harsh, rapid-fire calls.

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