

What do you know about Crows?

American crow

Also called the common crow
Latin name: *Corvus brachyrhynchos*

Crows are very intelligent - they use tools, solve problems, work cooperatively and are very adaptable.

“American crows can count!” <http://www.birdhouses101.com/crow.asp>

“About the only thing that can fool a crow very long is another crow. When corn is planted in straight rows, the crow finds a kernel, and goes right down the line. When it's cross-planted, he digs only where the marker lines intersect.” http://www.gobacktothebasics.com/interesting_facts_and_old_time_legends_of_the_crows_and_their_families.htm

“They are quite intelligent, when asked about their intelligence, McGowan responded that crows are “smarter than many undergraduates, but probably not as smart as ravens”. They have even matched primates in some intelligence tests; they may owe this ability to their habit of caching food, which requires excellent spatial memory (Dr. Kevin J. McGowan, Cornell University).” <http://www.bio.davidson.edu/people/vecase/Behavior/Spring2007/Burke/index.html>

“These crows use two different forms of hooked “tool” to pull grubs from deep within tree trunks.” http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2004/12/1209_041209_crows_apes.html

“Gareth Davies says that crows in Japan and California drop nuts in the road. If cars crush them, the crows retrieve their food. If the nuts are not crushed the crows place them in another part of the road.” <http://www.pbs.org/lifeofbirds/brain/>

Crows like to play.

“Juveniles and sometimes yearlings play with objects on the ground—e.g., bones, twigs, leaves—carrying them around, occasionally having tugs of war. Fledglings and juveniles jump-kick each other; lie on their sides and kick each other, and sometimes land on the belly of their playmate during play.” <http://bna.birds.cornell.edu/bna/species/647/articles/behavior>

Crow are family oriented.

“In most, but not all, populations the young stay with their parents and help raise young in subsequent years.” http://www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds/BirdGuide/American_Crow.html

“Near Lake Placid, FL, yearling helpers brought sticks to nests, fed incubating and brooding females as well as nestlings, and helped to keep the nest clean (Kilham 1989).” <http://bna.birds.cornell.edu/bna/species/647/articles/breeding>

“Older siblings, known as helpers, may take part in building the nest, feeding the incubating female, feeding the hatchlings, and chasing away predators. Some of these families are amazing,” says McGowan. “One marvelously successful crow family lives at St. Catherine's Church in Ithaca--a breeding pair and up to seven generations of siblings live on or next to the home territory there.” <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/Publications/LivingBird/spring98/crowsSp98.htm>

“Not only will crows defend and protect their own family, but they will come to the aid of unrelated crows in need or distress.” <http://www.zeebyrd.com/corvi29/>

Crows are part of the “clean-up” crew.

“Crows help control pest insects and “clean up” dead animals and garbage that has been scattered by other animals. A government biologist has estimated that a family of crows would destroy 38,000 harmful insects during their nesting period.” http://www.gobacktothebasics.com/interesting_facts_and_old_time_legends_of_the_crows_and_their_families.htm

“On the beneficial side, the crow diet includes large numbers of insects considered harmful to agriculture, as well as mice and carrion.” http://icwdm.org/handbook/birds/bird_e33.pdf

Crows protect each other by mobbing predators.

“Mobbing calls attract neighboring crows to the site; the collective noise is impressive. Kilham counted 136 crows mobbing one Great Horned Owl. When mobbing in flight, stays above the predator and dives at it, giving the Dive-Attack Call at the bottom of the dive, before pulling up sharply.”

<http://bna.birds.cornell.edu/bna/species/647/articles/behavior>

Crows like urban areas – fewer predators, readily available food, protection from predators, warmer, place to socialize.

“Cities are warmer than rural areas.... this is important for winter roosting. Artificial light makes predators visible. Crows like "nightlights" to protect them from their biggest bogeyman, the Great Horned Owl. Crows don't see well at night; owls do. Urban areas provide large trees for roosts. There are fewer predators present (fewer birds of prey, firearms can't be discharged in the City). Urban areas provide large trees for roosts.”

<http://www.birds.cornell.edu/crows/crowfaq.htm#urban> <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/crows/crowfaq.htm#roost>

“More recently, urban crows will enjoy feeding at garbage dumps, dumpsters at fast food restaurants, picnic areas, and any place where human food waste is available. I have personally observed a crow flying by overhead with an entire slice of pizza in its beak. (MJW)” <http://www.crows.net/food.html>

Crows don't spread the West Nile Virus - they are victims of it.

There have been no cases of the virus on PEI to date.

“The American Crow appears to be the biggest victim of West Nile virus, a disease recently introduced to North America. Crows die within one week of infection, and few seem able to survive exposure.”

http://www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds/BirdGuide/American_Crow.html

Although the risk of getting West Nile Virus is low, humans can get West Nile Virus if they are bitten by a mosquito carrying the virus. <http://www.gov.pe.ca/health/index.php3?number=1021148&lang=E>

Crow droppings – are they a health hazard?

“People living or working near urban roosts may fear diseases, but these fears are largely founded on misinformation or misunderstanding. It is true that accumulated fecal droppings at roost sites can create the conditions for histoplasma fungus to grow in the soil, and that inhaling the fungal spores can cause illness. However, exposure to these spores is not uncommon and can come from many other sources besides soil under crow roosts. Few exposed people ever become ill and even fewer develop a serious case of histoplasmosis. Most serious cases have been in spelunkers (cave explorers) exposed to dense accumulations of bat droppings, and in workers directly exposed to disturbed fungus-contaminated soil or to disturbed bird or bat droppings.”

<http://www.hsus.org/web-files/PDF/Urban-Crow-Fact-Sheet.pdf>

“Histoplasmosis is perhaps the most important disease acquired from bird droppings. It is caused by inhalation of spores of a soil-inhabiting fungus (*Histoplasma capsulatum*) that grows where bird droppings accumulate. The greatest risk occurs when droppings accumulate on shaded soil where large numbers of birds (or bats) have established roosts. Disturbing the droppings, e.g., during clean-up attempts, causes the spores to become airborne. Most people who inhale the spores experience mild flu-like symptoms or no symptoms at all.”

http://www.idph.state.il.us/envhealth/pcb_birds.htm

Crows post sentinels for protection.

“The idea that crows post sentinels in trees, where they watch for possible predators so other crows can safely feed on the ground nearby, has been considered for some time (Gross 1946, Montevecchi 1976). Sentinels call frequently, even in the absence of any threat, but feeding crows generally flush only when sentinels intensify their calling (Conner et al. 1975). Sentinel behavior seen most often in winter and when crows feed in small or confined areas, probably because of increased threat of predation (Maccarone 1987).”

<http://bna.birds.cornell.edu/bna/species/647/articles/behavior>