

## THE VILLAGE BIRDING LIFE

“Birds That Get No Respect: Part 2”

*by FSV Audubon*

You might be surprised to learn that crows and their cousins, ravens, are a common topic of mythology and folklore. For example, in the Bible, Noah sent a white raven to search for dry land. Unfortunately the slacker raven wasn't up to the job which doomed his kin to be a black feathered, carrion eaters for evermore. In contrast, other cultures revered crows because they carried souls to heaven. Bottom line- the view of crows throughout history has been schizophrenic. Take your pick: ingenious creators of the world and helpers of mankind or sinister, ungodly symbols of war and death.

Of course now we understand now that crows are just crows. They are the most obvious bird in the Village throughout the year. There are approximately 40 crow/raven species worldwide. They are found throughout most regions of North America, Asia and Europe. The Village has two species of crows, the American Crow and the Fish Crow. There are no ravens in Arkansas. American Crows are the most common in the Village as they are throughout the USA. Fish Crows are limited to the southeastern and mid-Atlantic states. The Ozark portion of Arkansas doesn't have Fish Crows. Both the American and Fish Crows are usually year round residents but some crows have limited migration. Fish Crows in the Village are migratory and most likely seen in the summer. Fish Crows are slightly smaller than the American but visually telling them apart is difficult. However they can be identified by their calls- the American has the common “caw-caw”; the Fish has a more nasal “uh-uh”.

Crows typically mate for life. The male and female work together in early spring to build a nest high in the crook of a tree. The nest is mostly sticks lined with whatever soft material they can find. An average of 4 or 5 turquoise-blue eggs are laid. Life for any young bird is hard and only about half survive. Crows are social birds who form large extended family groups. Some refer to these large groups as “a murder of crows”.

Part of the wide success of crows can be attributed to their varied diet. Crows, not unlike humans, can eat just about anything that is edible. More of their success, however, is due to their intelligence. Crows are the smartest of all birds. Their brain to body size ratio is similar to that of primates. One result of this is that crows communicate with over 250 distinct calls. One species of European crow has even demonstrated the ability to make and use a simple tool to aid in food gathering. Not many animals on Earth can match that!

Our attitude about crows remains split. Clearly crows have behaviors that are hard to like. Raiding bird nests for eggs and chicks does not endear them to bird lovers. Eating seed corn does not endear them to farmers. They steal snacks from golf carts. Eating carrion, while a benefit to all of us, lacks common appeal. In any event, crows are smart and adaptable. They

will be with us for a long time. Maybe, some respect is due.

As always HSVBIRDS.ORG has a lot of information about everything you'd like to know about birds. Note that the HSV Audubon website has available a Village birding checklist. It lists over 200 species of birds that might be seen by in the Village, when they might be seen and how common they are. It's a great way to keep track of the birds at your feeder.

HSV Audubon meets the 2nd Friday of each month, except July and August, at 10:00 at the Coronado Center. Guests are always welcome.

Photos by Vic Prislipsky