

AMERICAN CROW

Corvus brachyrhynchos

People through the publicity of the movies and old legends very well know the American Crow. What is not known is how complex its life really is. Young crows remain with their parents until they can find a home of their own, and individual relationships may last for years.

The American Crow have dark brown eyes, black legs and all feathers are black. They are approximately 16-21 inches tall, wingspan of about 33-39 inches and weight about 11-22 ounces. Their common call is a harsh “caw” but they also have a variety of rattles, coos and clear notes.

Young crows are about the same size as the adults, but have blue eyes and pink inside the mouth.

American Crows are often confused with Common Ravens. American Crows can be distinguished from Common Ravens most easily by size (ravens are much larger), by voice (ravens are hoarser), by the bill (ravens have a heavier, “roman-nosed” bills), and by the shape of the wings and tails, which come to a point in ravens but not crows.

Breeding season may begin as early as February and last through June. Nests are built by the male and the female high in a sturdy conifer or hardwood tree. Females lay 4-5 light green colored eggs with brown markings. The female

incubates the eggs; they hatch in about 18 days. The young fledge in approximately 35 days old. Most American Crows reach sexual maturity and begin to breed when they are two years old.

American crows have an unusual social system—they are cooperative breeders. This means that they stay close to the place they were born and help raise young and defend the area against predators. They will do this until they reach sexual maturity.

Most crows defend a large territory. All members of the family assist in chasing predators away.

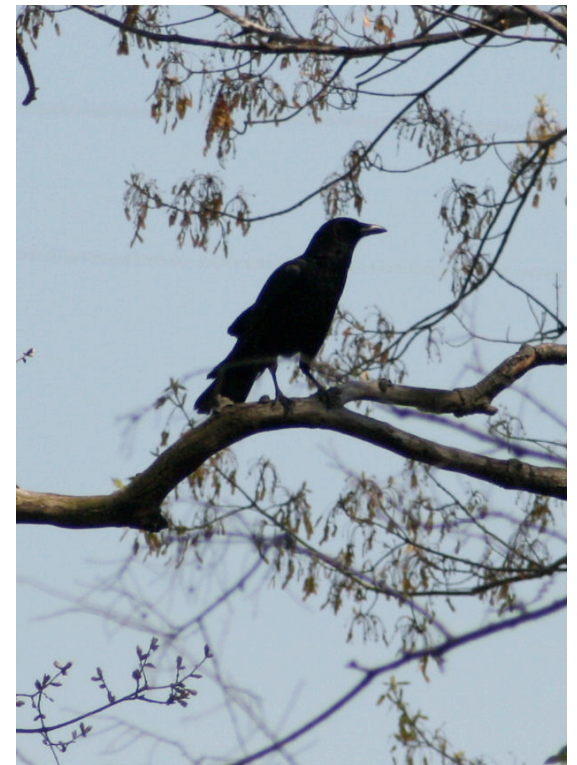
Winter roosting behavior begins in autumn and peaks in mid-winter. Large numbers of crows, from tens to hundreds of thousands, will assemble in the late afternoon hours in an area with large trees. Often the flock will move from this area to a final roosting area at nightfall.

In addition to family groups and winter roosts, crows may join a third kind of social group called a floater flock. During the breeding season, floater flocks of up to 50 birds have been observed. Floater flocks are believed to be made of ones that do not have mates or have not reached sexual maturity.

Crows will eat a variety of food. They eat, insects, larvae, fruits & grains. They also raid nests of other birds to eat their young or the eggs. They actively hunt and prey on small animals such as frogs, mice and

baby rabbits. They also scavenge for carrion.

Crows are very intelligent; they have been seen holding a nut in one foot and striking with the bill to open it. To open a particularly heavy-shelled food item such as a walnut or clam, a crow will fly high with it and drop it on a hard surface. It will also take a pretzel or similar hard food and take it to water to soak it and then eat it.



COOL FACTS

- American Crows congregate in large numbers in winter to sleep in communal roosts. These roosts can be a few hundred, to several thousands.
- Young crows do not breed until they are at least two years old and in most do not breed until four or more. In most populations the young stay with the parents and help them raise young. Families include up to 15 individuals and contain young from five different years.
- The American Crow appears to be the biggest victim of the West Nile virus. Crows die within one week of infection, and few seem able to survive exposure.

In any State, you can call your local Game & Inland Fisheries, local Veterinarian, or animal shelter and they should have some phone numbers for local Wildlife Rehabilitators.

If you have any questions you may call Pearl Beamer, State & Federally licensed Wildlife Rehabilitator within the state of Virginia about wildlife. Pearl specializes in Raptors, Crows and Loons. 757-855-2922 (7am-7pm)

AMERICAN CROW *Corvus brachyrhynchos*

