



California Wildlife Center

Patient of the Week

May 17, 2024

Corvid Curiosity

It is Corvid season here at CWC and our specialized Corvid unit coined “Crowtopia,” is bustling with young birds. There are 135 species in the Corvid family, including Common Ravens and American Crows. Crows and Ravens have acted as longstanding metaphors in literature and movies, often symbolizing wisdom, mystery, or even foreboding omens. This week we are pleased to spotlight these dynamic birds, who may seem commonplace but are anything but!

Ravens and crows can be found all over the United States and are quite common in cities, neighborhoods and open spaces. What really sets these avian species apart is their intelligence. The American Crow and Common Raven are opportunistic omnivores and are not super picky when choosing their next meal. Crows are extremely resourceful and can be seen eating just about anything. You may find them scouring your local trash bin, picking on roadkill, stealing chicken eggs, hunting lizards or foraging for grains and berries. Additionally, crows and ravens have been known to make and use tools to find food, fashioning sticks as probes to get insects in hard-to-reach places. The American Crow is very social and while they can find food independently, they have been known to work in pairs or family groups to acquire food. Some have even observed them teaming up to distract and steal food from other animals!

While ravens and crows are similar in many ways, they are different in a few distinct areas. Aside from their easily identifiable all-black appearance, they have some physical differences. The Common Raven is larger than the American Crow and has pointed tail feathers, whereas the crow has a fan-shaped tail. The Common Raven also has “hackles” on their throat which is a frill of visible feathers, while the American Crow has smooth feathers in that area. The two species have differing familial and social tendencies. The American Crow is very social and is often spotted in groups that can be made up of thousands of crows. They roost in large numbers and sleep communally. Many crows have been known to stay in family groups year-round, with offspring from previous years assisting their parents in the child rearing responsibilities. The Common Raven is less likely to be seen in groups and are often seen alone or in pairs.

The American Crow and Common Raven are remarkable creatures. Their complex family structures, resourcefulness and overall intelligence rivals that of many other species. Due to their complexity, CWC makes every effort to provide them with stimulation and enrichment while they are rehabilitating. For example, staff and volunteers will place flowers and hang eye-catching materials in the enclosures, in addition to providing boxes with shredded paper to root through for treats. These activities allow them to utilize their curiosity and strengthen their foraging muscles that they will rely on once released into the wild.

Since the beginning of 2024 CWC has received 43 American Crows and 29 Common Ravens! Corvids can be found in most places that humans live and congregate, and their remarkable intelligence and resilience deserve our attention.



Young American Crow in care at CWC.



Common Ravens perched in custom-built mew.