

PlantAmnesty ▲▲▲

Crows

by Cass Turnbull

People have definite feelings about crows. You either love 'em or hate 'em. Those who don't like them say crows are crafty, there are too many of them, they don't respect boundaries, and they can be destructive and sometimes even scary. But this description fits many species we don't like: rats, morning glory, and—most notably—the human animal. Crows have an uncanny knack of finding and raiding the robin's nest just outside a child's window—a vivid lesson on the dark side of nature. A birder I know once admitted quietly to me that “all birds predate other birds”—which I was sorry to learn. I think of crows as the juvenile delinquents of the bird world—strutting, cheeky, and noisy—probably why I like them. I remember waiting alone at the front door of the Highlands Country Club (which PlantAmnesty was about to rent for its Celebrity Gardener Auction) and watching a small group of crows work over the lawn just outside the pillared marble entryway. They systematically tore up the perfect, uniformly green, and close-cropped turf looking for grubs, riddling the smooth surface with divots. I swear they were swaggering, making me smile, revealing my own bad-girl schadenfreude.

Check out this story about how crows can torment even people, from a nice lady looking for a solution to her crow problem:

I live in the country, in a little wood full crows and their nests. They don't bother us; we don't bother them. But there is a particular pair of crows that are always together, most likely a couple. I believe they don't live in the same wood as the other crows, but on a large, single tree closer to the house. Every single morning for the past two years, we've been awakened by the two of them knocking on our windows, at 8:30am on the dot in winter and in the summer as early as 3.30am. Sometimes they knock just a few times, other times they knock until movement starts inside the house. Reflection from the windows cannot be the problem, as they use different windows every time, upstairs as well as downstairs. Often the two crows start knocking on two different windows on different ends of the house. They seem to be playing a game—the first crow goes knock, knock, knock, then the second answers from another window knock, knock, knock, then back again to the first, and so on, often for hours. They consistently knock in intervals of three to each other. It drives our dogs totally mad and leaves us sleep deprived on a regular basis.

Normal tricks like crow stickers, figurines, or shiny CDs in the window don't work with these crows, who are far too clever to fall for such tactics. I would not hurt such intelligent creatures (or any creature) in any way, but two years is a long time to put up with their messing—and I don't know how old they can get. Anybody have any ideas for changing their behavior?

PlantAmnesty ▲▲▲



Those bloody crows got to the robin's nest.

There's more! Crows are known to pull the tails of eagles and mercilessly tease dogs. They discipline their misbehaving youth, help wounded friends, and gather and grieve loudly over a fallen comrade. Once, across the street from me, a young crow managed to electrocute itself pecking on the transformer on the telephone pole. A loud pop and flickering lights, triggered my husband and I to race outside to investigate. Within five minutes, twenty birds had gathered in trees nearby cawing loudly as if demanding to know who the murderer of their friend was. The City Light crew arrived in a big orange truck. One fellow used a kind of litter stick with a claw on one end to pick up the corpse and place it in a 10-gallon bucket tied to the back of the truck. The crew told us crow season was here and that crows are a frequent cause of power outages, second only to falling tree limbs.

I like crows because they like shiny objects. I like their vocabulary and that they can figure things out and use tools. I like their big unapologetic nests in the tops of trees and their iridescent black feathers. I like to see them gathering at dusk, all flying to the same location—their evening roost. Many videos of swirling crows arriving at one of their roosts are available on YouTube. I have promised myself to visit a roost some night this summer and have jotted down the address of one in Bothell. I expect an impressive sight—a little scary and very noisy—until falling darkness brings silence. I am intrigued by the dark mythology of crows and the ominous words used to describe them—murder, mobbing, and vanishing.

Vanishing is the term used when all the crows of a town suddenly leave. I know that on occasion a group crows will gather and kill one of their own. Nobody knows why. I conclude with a few interesting facts about crows:

- Crows will build fake nests to fool predators.
- Pet crows give their owners names, assigning them a unique sound.
- Crows can count to six.
- Crows sun bath for Vitamin D.
- Crows mate for life.
- Crows prefer McDonalds fries over others.