



# MONTEREY NEWS

April 2023  
Est. 1970 Vol. LIII • Number 4



## The American Crow and The Fish Crow

The American crow is one of the most widely distributed and recognized birds in North America. According to naturalists, there are more crows in this country now than when the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth. Their success is due in part to the fact that they take good care of their young and are very clever in defending them against numerous enemies. With spring coming on, the American crows are returning from their winter gathering places. During winter they gather in huge flocks so they can roost safely and warm near municipal heating systems and in the warmer air flows above rivers.

In my illustration I show a fish crow left behind all winter in the seaside cold and snow on Little Bay in Fairhaven, MA. The fish crow is slightly smaller than the American crow and hard to separately identify. One difference is they make a muted crowing, “urk, urk, urk” compared to the American crow’s loud “caw, caw, caw.” The population of fish crows is increasing and their habitat range is spreading further north, inland up the rivers away from the coasts. They have become much more common for bird watchers in recent years.

All crows can recognize certain people and they remember how they’ve been treated. They also have a habit of collecting a treasure trove of shiny objects on the ground near their nests that they enjoy turning over to brag about from time to time. They can also imitate a range of human sounds, like a child crying, a hen clucking, or a rooster crowing at the rising sun at dawn. Males are skilled in courtship with females



in flight as they both do acrobatics to demonstrate the relationship together. Henry Ward Beecher once remarked that, “If men had wings and bore black feathers, few of them would be clever enough to be crows.”

Crows have earned a crafty, albeit bad reputation among humans as a thief and robber by stealing eggs and baby birds from nests. However, when they see a hawk or an owl about to do the same thing, they call together more of their kind to dive loudly from above to mob and drive the predators out of the area. The bad reputation of crows sometimes appears in children’s literature of fables and legends in the form of almost supernatural scheming to find a way to get what they want. On the other hand, some Native Americans’ stories feature crows as tricksters, teachers, or symbols of great importance.

— George B. Emmons