

# School-to-Nature



## Crow / American Crow

The bird we call the Crow is a mid-sized member of the *Corvus* genus named *Corvus brachyrhynchos*, which means “the short-beaked Crow.” Crows are present all over the U.S. and southern Canada, and are commonly seen on Conservancy lands. They may migrate short distances south if snow covers their food sources. They are 16-20 inches in length including the tail, a large bird. Crows are entirely black, including legs and beak; but older birds may sometimes show brownish feather coloration as shown in the picture on the left. They do not have iridescent coloring like their cousin the Grackle. American crows make the familiar *caw-caw*, but also have a large repertoire of rattles, clicks, and even clear bell-like notes.

Crows spend most of the year as nesting pairs or small family groups. They usually mate for life, and they nest early in the season, usually raising only one brood of 4-5 chicks. Other local crows that are not nesting have been seen helping to feed nestlings or bringing food to the mom and dad on the nest. When they’re away from their home territory to forage for food, crows form larger flocks, and will mix with other *Corvus* members for safety.

Of all the living birds, crows, ravens, and parrots have the biggest brain-to-body size ratios, and are extremely intelligent. Their intelligence has been compared with that of the great apes. Native Americans considered the crow as very wise and even felt crows could talk with humans. Many stories seem to prove this high intelligence. The sight of a dead crow has been witnessed to attract a hundred or more live crows, who seem to be mourning, or investigating the reason the crow has died. In California and Japan, crows have been seen putting walnuts on a busy street at a red light for cars to roll over; then on the next red light, they go back for the nut inside. An experiment proved crows can recognize a person and remember if they have treated them nicely or not. They have been seen diving at people who were cruel to them.

In historical times crows were associated with death, bad omens, or witchcraft. But many persons now find them lucky. Crows seem to be smart birds, and survivors.

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