

# Corvi Chronicle

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## CELEBRITY TOOL MAKER

# Why New Caledonia?



Because of heretofore unknown-to-us tool making activities, the New Caledonian Crow has become one of the celebrity species of the decade. Among those interested in the abilities of other bloods, these birds presently are vying for attention along with such well-established aren't-they-clever stars as chimpanzees, dolphins and parrots.

Indisputably – because of numerous field and laboratory observations – the crows of New Caledonia are genuine tool makers. From decisively selected and collected twigs, stiff leaves and the spines of them, they fabricate with their beaks probes, picks and hooks. They use these instruments to extract, from crevices in the ground and in trees, insect grubs, a major item to their diet. These tools are of standard, replicated design, no accidentally found objects.

Now that our initial astonishment about how crafty they are has subsided a bit these birds have begun inspiring more substantial speculations. For example, a New Zealand researcher, Russell Gray, raises a question, which immediately brings up more, equally central ones.

“Why them?” asks Gray. “Why is this species on a small island in the Pacific able to not just use but to manufacture a variety of tools, and in a flexible rather than a rote or programmatic way? Why are they able to do at least as well as chimpanzees on experiments of cognition that show an understanding of the physical properties of the world and an ability to generalize from one problem to the next?”

There is a reality which must be acknowledged before tackling why-only-them questions about New Caledonian crows or for that matter, anything else. It is: Quite possibly there are more tool-making species or ones who could and might become such but we have not yet

recognized them. A quip which has long circulated among natural historians is: “The range of most species coincides with the range of graduate students.” The point is even sharper if behavior rather than distribution is considered.

So there may well be others but given the interests of Chronicle readers let us arbitrarily restrict this to corvids.

As with all other behaviors, environmental factors may or may not have forced New Caledonian crows to become tool makers but certainly allowed them to be. This island has a rich protein source – crevice dwelling invertebrates – for crows. The crevice creatures could (can) be exploited by using only beak and bill. But more are more easily obtained with a probe or hook. There was material on the island suitable for being shaped into such a tool by a crow.

By way of environmental contrast: On Baffin Island I have watched ravens using their heavy beaks to dig out dead lemmings, frozen several inches below the surface of a glacier. It took a raven 10 minutes or so to chip away enough ice to get at the edible lemming. Watching them hammer away made me wonder if this kind of work might give a bird a headache. It certainly seemed like they could use a good ice pick. But in this iced-over, biotically-challenged end of the world there is little to be found which could serve as an ice pick, very few materials from which a raven could make one even if it were so inclined.



Russell Gray has given thought to the possibility that New Caledonian crows are especially endowed for exploiting their special environment. He notes that in proportion to their size all corvids have unusually large brains, particularly in regards the portion of that organ involved

in associative learning and motor skills. While the anatomy of many of the other 45 species of crows and ravens remains little studied or unstudied, Gray comments, “...preliminary evidence suggests that the New Caledonian brain [of crows] is big even for corvids.” He and others have also observed that these birds have bills which “are more like a human opposable thumb than the standard corvid beak.”

(All of which raises a chicken-and-egg question which we sometimes ask about ourselves. Before they actually began to do so were people mental and manipulative enough to have made, if they wanted, tools? Or did we become – through mutation and natural selection – endowed as we now are because very distant ancestors, more or less accidentally, used found objects as tools?)

It may indeed prove true that among the corvids the New Caledonian ones have an intelligence which especially, if not uniquely, endows them as tool makers. However, that they and we are for the moment the only tool makers known to us does not necessarily elevate these birds above other crows and ravens on a smartness scale. (Comparative intelligence exercises founder on the question: “Intelligent for what?”)

Though as yet none of them involve tool making, there have been numerous reports in the Chronicle and elsewhere of crows and ravens making use of the intelligence; i.e., decisive responses to needs and problems apparently based on observation, memory and cognition rather than rote instinct.

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CELEBRITY TOOL MAKER continued:

## *Benefits of exceptionally cultured species*

❖ In Florida crows have been known to drive gulls off their nests by bombarding them with pebbles and mud balls. When the gulls leave the crows swoop down to take and eat their eggs.

❖ In Tokyo crows place hard-shelled walnuts in front of cars halted a traffic signals. They dodge out of the way when the vehicles begin moving but dart back down when the light again turns red to pick nutmeats from the crushed shells.

❖ Moistened with a little water after being put in a feeding bowl, a dried dog food was the customary food of a free flying crow in a Chicago behavioral lab. Occasionally an attendant forgot to wet down the dry kernels. After this happened several times, the crow began to do so. Dipping water from an open trough into a small plastic cup, which had been given to the bird as a plaything – it carried the water to and poured it on the dry food. Sometimes, to make the chow satisfyingly damp, the crow had to make several trips since not spilling while flying with a small cup of water clenched in the beak requires tricky balancing.

❖ The number of Arctic ravens who might have need for an ice pick is declining because increasingly these birds are foraging around landfills, shopping centers and loading docks in Fairbanks, Yellowknife, Frobisher Bay and other recently established, modern style, northern communities. Theirs is part of a continuing world-wide movement of corvids from wild and rural lands into our towns, cities and suburbs. Whether or not this migration (very similar to one people are making) is thoughtfully inspired, it seems in terms of consequences to be an intelligent decision. From the standpoint of crows and ravens our urban areas are richer in food resources, better lit at night, somewhat warmer and much safer from predators – human and other ones – than are relatively unsettled farm and ranchlands or such places as polar ice fields.

A CONCEIT: Over-heard conversation between New Caledonia Crow and a visiting Fairbanks Raven –

NCC: "I'll show you. You just take

this stem, snip it there and there, twist the end a little bit and you've got yourself a tool."

FR: "Okay. What then?"

NCC: "You can hook out any grub up to two inches long from a crevice you can't get your beak in."

FR: "How about that. We don't have many grubs up where I come from, or crevices either. But that's a cute little thing. Maybe I can get a couple of them from you to take home to the chicks. I've been meaning to pick up a few souvenirs. Flying in I saw a town or sort of town at the other end of your island. What's it called?"

NCC: "Noumea."

FR: "You fellows ever think of working there?"

NCC: "Full of people. And a lot of them speak French."

FR: "I'm not trying to tell you how to suck eggs. That's an expression. But if those Noumeans are like the people I know, they'll be easy marks, just lay things out for the taking. They got a Micky D's in this Noumea?"

NCC: "A what?"

FR: "Joints with yellow arches. Lots of light. You get a good one, you can sit there all night scoffing down stuff. Don't have to do anything but swallow."

NCC: "Doesn't it make you lazy? Corrupt ambition and enterprise? Like welfare?"

FR: "Man, just another easy way to get your grub. You get that one? You wouldn't need all those what-do-you-call-ems. Those tools. Save wear and tear on your beak. Think about it."

(As a matter of fact corvid researchers

at the University of Washington presented some Seattle crows with two bags of identical french fries. One bag was unmarked while the other was provided, standardly inscribed, by McDonald's. Without hesitation the crows chose to rip open and feed on the contents of the bag from Micky D's whose logo they recognized.)



When they leave the nest young New Caledonia crows do not immediately begin making tools. This is an acquired skill, one which they learn by observing and being instructed by older birds. They are able to do so because in addition to environmental opportunity, necessary mental and manipulative endowments they are members of an exceptionally cultured species. So are other beings who we deem to be most clever: crows, ravens, parrots, coatis, canines, elephants, primates and of course ourselves. All of them have good memories, are social, communicative and cooperative. Characteristically the young remain with their elders – usually but not always in extended family groups – much longer than do those of less cultured creatures. They mature, in regards behavior, more slowly than they do physically. A plausible, elegantly simple explanation for this was given by the late Lawrence Kilham, among the most indefatigable and insightful field observers of American crows and ravens. Kilham once remarked, "It takes a long time to learn to be a good crow." (New Caledonian crows remain in their family group for at least two years while American crows may do so for eight years before establishing their own families.)

Culture is a word of slippery and elastic meaning. Here it is used to describe a repository in which is collected and preserved some of the experiences of a distinctive group of sentient creatures: species of them, races, nations, associations and families. These repositories make it unnecessary for all of the members of well-cultured groups to be always reinventing the wheel. Or more to the

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*It takes a long  
time to learn to  
be a good crow. --  
Lawrence Kilham*

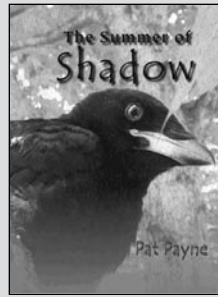
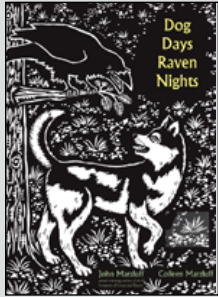
Yale University Press has released *Dog Days, Raven Nights* a new book by raven researchers John M. and Colleen Marzluff and illustrated by Evon Zerbetz. The book

recounts a three-year stint in Maine 20 years ago by the then recently married couple in post graduate research with Bernd Heinrich. It was the first extensive study of the winter ecology of the Common Raven. The couple use their field notes and personal diaries to recount their exploration of the nature of relationships, both animal and human. John Marzluff is professor of wildlife science in the College of the Environment at the University of Washington. He is author of four books including *In the Company of Crows and Ravens*. Colleen Marzluff is a wildlife biologist and skilled in raising and training sled dogs and herding dogs. In Maine, they needed sled dogs to get deep into the woods to study the ravens. The book's illustrator Zerbetz of Ketchikan, Alaska, has shared her art with the Chronicle for a number of years.

*The Summer of Shadow* by Pat Payne. Trafford Publishing, [www.trafford.com](http://www.trafford.com)

Many ASCAR members have enjoyed the company of a free-flying crow (raised as a founding) for a summer. They also know the sadness which comes when the affectionate bird eventually leaves to join, as is best, the company of wild crows. Payne's

## BOOK Shelf



well-illustrated, modestly written book charmingly describes both the joy and sorrow of such experiences.

*Perfect Mistakes* by D.H. Bleything. Traprock Books, Eugene, Ore.

A collection of poems which for the most part are inspired by national objects, happenings and beings. Of particular interest for Chronicle readers is one of these poems which bears the same title as the book itself. The first lines of it read:

A recollection of crows  
restless in all aspects,  
they circle, blossoming  
like perfect mistakes.

*Black Crow and Thunderhat* by Dana Simson, Sourdough Press, Upper Fairmount, Md.

Children's story written and illustrated by Simson who in this tale gives crows the role of collecting shards of lightning lingering in gardens and pastures from previous thunderstorms

to help a cloud, Thunderhat, bring a welcome rain.

*The Summer of the Crows: Not Your Typical Boy Meets Crow Story* by Tony Ducklow.

Tucker McTeal and his friends have just finished fifth grade and are banned from watching television or playing video games for the summer. The ban was a penalty for some mischief they got into as school ended. The boys think their summer is ruined but discover it is one of the best ever.

The tale is based on the author's childhood in St. Paul, Minn. Ducklow and his friends all had pet crows. His (and Tucker's) was named "Egg."

Ducklow told the Oakdale Lake Elmo Review: "The part about the crows – I always thought that would be such a great story to tell because so few people understand what they are."

Tucker and his friends take their crows on bicycle rides and other ventures around St. Paul, which in the late 1960s had more open spaces and wooded lots for camping, fishing and exploration. All things Ducklow recalls doing with "Egg" and his friends and their crows.

While he doesn't encourage kids to have pet crows, Ducklow regarded his experience with a crow and being out of doors as key to shaping his life.

Ducklow says it's harder for youngsters today to experience the sense of adventure he recalls through his fictional Tucker. Remotes and keyboards pale in comparison.

### CELEBRITY TOOL MAKER continued

## *Expanding consciousness and behavioral options*

point here, oblige each generation to discover how to make grub hooks or to use automobiles as nutcrackers.

It seems very unlikely that the crows of New Caledonia have always been tool makers or that they became such because and after one of them had a eureka or epiphanic moment. Given what is known of our own passage from stone- to space-age creatures, a much more likely scenario is: Exposed to accidental hap-

penings and environmental opportunities of certain sorts, some crows were cognitive enough to develop – hit and miss – innovative responses, the significance of which was preserved in the group's cultural repository. Little by little, the store of experience expanded until eventually some crows made enough use of it to become tool makers. Beginning most probably with the mates and offspring of these innovators, tool making was adopt-

ed by other of these social, communicative and cognitive birds. (Instructively, in different families and locales, New Caledonian crows shape their tools somewhat differently.)

Culture expands the consciousness and behavioral option of individuals by giving them access to the collective mind and memory of the group. – *Corvi 43, Michigan Roost*



## THE TALK OF THE ROOST

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### COVERT CORVI

**Y**ears from now when top secret details of the search for Osama bin Laden are declassified, we may know whether Afghan crows or ravens had a role in finding him.

Almost a week after President Obama announced that bin Laden had been killed, Liz Jones of Seattle's public radio station KUOW broke the story that the U.S. military had considered using crows to identify bin Laden as an enemy.

John Marzluff, University of Washington wildlife sciences professor, told Jones that the military had contracted with him and his team of researchers to study if crows or ravens in Afghanistan could help in the bin Laden search and possibly other search-and-rescue work.

"One of the experimental branches of research that was used to try to find him was to have crows or ravens of the local area trained to identify his face," he told KUOW.

As previously reported in the Chronicle and in this issue, Marzluff has studied crow and ravens abilities to recognize and remember human faces – and to pass that knowledge on to the next generation. Realizing that crows seemed to remember faces when he and his team used nets to trap and tag crows, Marzluff had his researchers wear masks – usually cave-men faces -- as they trapped and tagged crows. Later if the researchers walked in a crowd in a tagging area wearing the same masks, crows would become agitated and mob the masked researchers.

When the researchers removed the masks – or switched to a different mask (including one of Dick Cheney – See Chronicle Winter 2007, No. 3, "Operative Cover") the birds lost interest.

The U.S. military funding for Marzluff's research ended a few years ago and he said he wasn't sure if crows or ravens had a direct role in the hunt for bin Laden.

### CORVID FOOTY CLUBS

**B**y chance we learned of Oslo Crows, Norway's oldest Australian Rules football club, when reading an entry from "World Footy News" ([worldfootynews.com](http://worldfootynews.com)) about the club's wins in a three-way tournament this spring against Western Sweden's Göteborg Berserkers and the Karlstad Eagles.

World Footy News provides independent news and views from the international Australian Football ("footy" to those in its traditional homelands of southern and western Australia) community. WFN seeks to foster awareness of Australian Football around the globe and to aid communication between clubs, leagues and those playing and supporting Aussie Rules.

Curious about Australian Football teams bearing corvid names, we found the following from Europe: the Clare Crows, in County Clare, based in Ennis on Ireland's western coast; the Guilford Crows, in Guilford, Surrey, England; Iceland Ravens, a Facebook group for footy fans; the Kariskrona Magpies, in Kariskrona,

Sweden; Midwest Magpies, Aussie Rules team from Galway and Midwest Magpies (Galway), in Galway and Castlebar, Ireland; Putney Magpies, football club in London; the Swansea Magpies, in Swansea, Wales, and the Andoorra Crows, in the Pyrenees Mountains.

In Japan, the Komazawa Magpies, a University footy club in Tokyo; and in Oman, the Muscat Magpies, Oman's Australian Football and Gaelic club.

In the United States WFN lists: the Austin Crows and Dallas Magpies (a premier club) both in Texas; and New York Magpies, Aussie Rules in the Big Apple.

### LOOKING FOR THE REMOTE

**I**n his Oct. 21, 2010, column, "The Splice," (Spokane (Wash.) Spokesman Review), Paul Turner writes: If you need convincing that crows are smart, just talk to Keri Yirak.

The other day, she was watching a squirrel in her backyard. A crow was watching too.

The rodent had acquired some peanuts and was burying them. Eventually, it finished and bounded away.

The crow took this as its cue to swoop down and harvest the nuts.

So maybe, months from now, the squirrel will revisit that spot, and think, "I could have sworn I stashed some legumes here."

Meanwhile, it's tempting to wonder if there are some larcenous Spokane crows with information regarding the whereabouts of certain TV remotes.

# Lexiconic leadership

The Corvi Chronicle is always mindful of its responsibilities as a lexiconic leader. Therefore the following is offered to assist readers who may wish to keep abreast – an expression – with new linguistic developments. The following definitions have been compiled by scholars of the Department of Current Cant at Corvi College.

**A**ctivist: Depending on their ideological bent, may be used to describe a public-spirited patriot or a subversive troublemaker.

**B**ase: Formerly a mean-spirited person or idea; now groups of citizens who if well fed with political red meat will always vote the right way even if it is wrong.

**C**ommon Sense: Provides simple solutions for uncommonly complex problems.

**D**epression: An ancient, and common human condition or mood which has morphed into an American disease of epidemic proportions.

**E**xpedient: A suspect, if not technically illegal, tactic or policy which may prove to be profitable or poll well.

**F**ace Time: Sensual rather than virtual exchanges between two or more people.

**G**lobal Warming: 1. A recent trend documented by climatologists;  
2. An act of capitalistic terror committed by industrialists, SUV drivers and cows;  
3. Propaganda spread by Al Gore and other environmental terrorists to discredit entrepreneurs and carnivores while confusing hard working Americans (qv).

**H**ard Working Americans: Gainfully employed, legal citizens who dependably vote for one's own party. Those who don't, seldom work very hard and when they do are usually overpaid by public agencies to be teachers, social

workers, pothole fillers or something else of that ilk.

**I**ntransigent: Stubborn refusal to abandon a principle or position and move on to a more common-sensical one.

**J**ihadists: Fierce enemy combatants who terrorize and kill without the benefit of uniforms, helicopters, drone missiles or many other items required for the conduct of civilized and humane warfare.

**K**indly: To appear to be – at photokops and such – empathetically supportive of popwar causes which do not require additional funding or impolitic roll call votes, e.g. Orphans without Grandparents Week; synonymous with "avuncular."

**L**ibertarian: A gainfully employed and property owning but timid anarchist.

**M**arginalize: A sleazy tactic used by the elite media to dismissively mock the staff and guests of Fox News.

**N**ation Building: Freeing up another nation to behave as we think it should. Nation building often requires bombardment, invasion and a certain amount of regrettable collateral destruction.

**O**bvious: That which a person with common sense (qv) can always see clearly but the ideologically blinded obviously cannot.

**P**opulists: Politicians and pundits who strongly favor ideas and behaviors which large numbers of people already believe to be absolutely correct.

**Q**uintessential: An obvious (qv) element which common sense (qv) indicates is essential to the nature of a thing; e.g., a quintessential truth is one

that can only be disputed by intransigent (qv) malcontents.

**R**egime Change: To get rid of governments and governors for whom we have no immediate geopolitical needs and who have done cruel and immoral things which we can no longer stand.

**S**ocialists: Camouflaged commies, dogooders, elitists and ne'er-do-wells who are not gainfully employed.

**T**ea Party: A political and cultural movement that opposes taxes with representation.

**U**nions: Craftily if not illegally organized cabals of ignorant, slothful wage earners who harass employers, drive up taxes and prices and vote socialist (qv).

**V**ictims: Aggravating individuals who whine a lot about injustices, indignities and injuries they have suffered and expect sympathy from others.

**W**elfare: Public assistance given to some of the most and many of the least deserving members of the unluckily lower classes. Public assistance given to private auto makers, bankers, corporate farmers and other hard working Americans is a bailout, subsidy or stimulant and, more formally, a manifestation of American exceptionalism.

**X**enophobic: A currently popular invective that can be safely used by public speakers and the media to identify stone cold racists, bigots, border-fencers and such.

**Y**ardstick: A flexible measuring device which enlarges one's own accomplishments and those of like-minded colleagues while diminishing those of opponents.

**Z**ero Sum: Without meaning or consequence; zilch.



## Picking up the pieces ROADSIDE ART

**K**aren Bondarchuk says “Crows are scavengers by nature, and so am I.”

She is a visual artist whose work ranges from sculpture and drawing to video and bookmaking. Her current sculpture and drawing work, centering on crows and ravens, examines the complex, interwoven relationship between humans and corvids.

Bondarchuk’s larger than life sculptures of crows – most belly up – are created from blown tire scraps she has found along interstate highways in Michigan. She teaches at the Gwen Frostic School of Art at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo.

On her Web site, Bondarchuk says of her scavenging and her crow sculptures: “I found the morphology of the material quite animal-like (coming from the numerous times I confused a dead tire with road kill from a distance). The sides and medians of interstate highways are uninhabitable and noisy dead zones, reeking of automobile exhaust and riddled with an amazing array of carcasses and garbage. Aside from the steady onslaught of passing traffic, the only company I keep during my debris-collecting jaunts is with the occasional crow.”

“*Corvus Deflatus*, *Corvus Detritus*, *Corvus Reductus* and *Corvus Osiris* reinforce this connection, as they are created out of the scavenged scraps of tires I have collected from the sides of Interstate 94 in Michigan. The titles of these works refer to the genus *corvus* (namely, crows and ravens in the corvid family) and the deflated tires that constitute them.

“The expired tire scraps reinforce the deathly prostration of these birds, while also evoking the failing automobile industry. As many families attempt to pick up the pieces of their lives after layoffs and plant closures, the roadside debris that I collect directly represents a bygone era of prosperity and livelihood in Michigan, Ontario and elsewhere in the Midwest.

“I have resided in Michigan for the past 15 years, and have watched the automobile industry falter and expire. The prone sculptures are a literal and symbolic manifesta-

tion of this deterioration, while the environmental impact of the automobile industry is manifest in each sculpture, conveying the uncomfortable rub between industrial progress and environmental degradation.

“My hope is that the human scale facilitates an empathic connection to these amazingly intelligent birds and our own human mortality and vulnerability, while also acknowledging the larger-than-life industry that now lay in ruin all over the Midwest.”

Bondarchuk’s sculpture work has won awards in Michigan, Illinois and Maryland, and was included in a 2010 traveling exhibit as part of the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum’s *Birds in Art* exhibition.

Her work is in the permanent collection of the National Gallery of Canada and several other public and private collections. Or visit [karenbondarchuk.com](http://karenbondarchuk.com)

Top: *Corvus Detritus* in exhibit at the Edison Place Gallery, Washington, D.C.; center *Corvus Reductus* at James C. Westin Gallery, Kalamazoo, Mich.; and below: a roadside tire scrap typical of those that inspired Karen Bondarchuk’s current corvi sculptures.



# ROOST NOTES *city lights, public rage*

In the United States movement from rural to more urban habitats has been taking place for some time among both people and crows. So far as the latter are concerned this is particularly noticeable in regards the location of their winter-time roosts. There are sites where hundreds, often thousands, of birds congregate to spend nights packed together in small brushy woodlots. In the morning they leave these roosts in foraging flocks but – from November to late March – return each evening to them.

Until 50 years or so ago most of these roosts were found, according to ornithological report, in farming and other lightly settled areas. Now this is rare as most crow roosts are presently in or around clumps of trees in city parks, shopping centers and other commercial districts. This change has occurred for good corvid reasons, ones which in ourselves we would call rational.

❖ Urban roosts are convenient, abundant, never failing, easy-to-get at sources of choice crow food, i.e. our garbage.

❖ There are of course many firearms in cities and suburbs and they are frequently used there. But in most communities people shoot only people and are prohibited by law and convention from gunning down other creatures. Thus a crow or two sometimes may be hit accidentally in shootouts between civilians, cops and robbers. But in the country, crow hunting especially in early evening around roosts is a legal and, in many places, a popular sport.

❖ Because of us, urban areas after sundown are now much more brightly lit than are rural ones. This extends the activity period for crows whose nighttime vision is no better than, perhaps not quite as good as, our own. Also city lights tend to somewhat frustrate traditional crow predators, perhaps most importantly, great-horned owls.

Sam Walmer, a veteran ASCAR researcher from New Jersey, specializes in locating winter roosts. This is not difficult since in the area between the Great Lakes and Masxon-Dixon Line roosts are seldom more – often less – than 30 miles apart. But Walmer's work does require a lot of driving in the bad traffic hours. Not entirely facetiously he advises those who want to see a winter crow roost to look first in places within sight of a McDonald's golden arch.

A 10,000, say, bird count is noisy in the early evening and morning, gets messier as the winter progresses and after an early spring thaw is quite apt to be odoriferous. Consequently if it is located in the vicinity of a McDonald's, an apartment complex or courthouse, some visitors to or residents of the place are going to find it objectionable. These neat/nice types don't want their nature to get too unruly, prefer to view it on cable TV or in coffee table books. They may put up with a roost for a few months but once they have found one they like, crows are apt to return to the same site year after year. When they do, some of the disgruntled inevitably evolve into anti-crow activists. They begin badgering – an expression – public authorities

to do something about these loud, dirty, disruptive birds; drive them away with fireworks and sound cannons, cut down the trees where they roost; if necessary poison or shoot them. Other than environmental and compassionate ones there are many good, rational reasons – having to do with public health and safety – for not using such violent tactics. But now and then the instinct for political survival moves public officials to do so. Usually there is a counter reaction. Fortunately – though they are normally quiet, sensible, tolerant sorts – there are many crow admirers who will rally to prevent crow wars or halt ones which have been started. There are heated exchanges at public meetings, in the print and electronic media, sometimes actually on-site confrontations between for-and-against-crows people.

A controversy of this sort has been going on for more than five years in Auburn, N.Y., and now and then has caught the attention of the national media. (“Now, Doris Lee, let's turn to the weirder side of today's news. Look at those crows – and the people too – in Auburn, N.Y.” Thereafter mention is invariably made of the old Alfred Hitchcock film, “The Birds.”)

Roland Micklem is a Corvi and a resident of Savannah, N.Y., which is not far from Auburn, close enough to draw him into this crow war. Micklem writes “We corvidiphiles of the area are of course less than pleased by the attitudes of the Auburn citizenry. They are lacking in both compassion for their fellow creatures and imagination.”

But being of ASCAR, Micklem does not simply point out the flaws in the character of the Anti-Crows. As a positive thinking man he goes on to suggest what might be called an ecological solution to the confrontation in Auburn.

“They could easily turn the nightly flyover of these corvid hordes into a real tourist attraction. There's a Dunkin' Donuts concession directly under one of the major aerial routes, and many's the time I and friends – including the corvid groups who told me about ASCAR – have intentionally dropped in for a cup of coffee just as the overhead action was getting underway. There we'd sit at a table near the window, remain until the last of the stragglers had passed, and cough up another \$1.60 apiece for second cups we'd never order if this daily phenomenon of nature had not been taking place.

“I tried in vain to convince the management of DD to install a glass roof and advertise their establishment as a hot spot for eco-tourism during the off season. Other strategically located dining establishments could follow suit, and the City of Auburn would indeed have something to crow about.

“Anyway, I'm grateful to have discovered some kindred spirits in another part of the country. Enclosed is a check for the two cups of coffee I didn't buy during what would have been a good flyover season, save for the lack of initiative on the part of the Auburn business community.”

## SHARING

Dear Fellow Corvi:

We feed crows by throwing food out in our backyard. One day, my wife threw out some bread and chips for the crows. Before she returned to the house, the air was filled with “cawing” and six to eight crows descended on the food. After entering the house, she went to the kitchen sink to wash her hands. Her appearance scared away all the crows but one, who continued to stuff his beak with food. The other crows flew to a nearby tree waiting for my wife to leave. But the solitary crow that stayed behind did something unique. After filling his beak with food, he flew over to the tree and dropped the food onto the ground for the other crows. The “tree crows” then came down out of the tree and ate the food while the bearer of the snack stood back; he actually picked up two chips and placed them closer to another crow to eat. – *Corvi 85, Astoria, Ore.*

Editor’s note: The Astorian crow is sometimes confused with the Culture Vulture. For additional information about the latter, see page 3 of this issue.

## ANCESTORS

Greetings

A friend (Ken Bausert) recently sent me a copy of the spring 2010 Corvi Chronicle. I have never seen one before and it was an interesting read. For about eight years now, I’ve had a fascination with birds in general. Anytime something major happens, I seem to notice something strange with bird(s). As if they are marking the occasion. The last occurrence was about 10 months ago and involved a pair of bald eagles. However this was not the strangest.

In July of 2006, I was called to the chaplin’s office one afternoon where



Illustration by Jim Haines

## LETTERS

I was informed that my girlfriend was “involved in a homicide.” When I left the chapel area, I was made to return to the recreation yard which was soon to close. It was crowded when I got through the gate and I wasn’t in the mood for crows. To the left, just inside the gate is a small pavilion. It’s used occasionally when the prison bands play. There’s no tables, but usually inmates are congregated in the area. Three sides of the pavilion are surrounded by maybe 15 feet of grass. There was no one under the pavilion this particular afternoon, unusual in itself. I headed that direction with my mind on other things. I was shaken back to reality when I stepped on the concrete and noticed the birds. The grass on all three sides were covered with small black birds. There must have been hundreds of them. More than I’ve seen in any one place any time in my life. I scanned back and forth, sensing that they were trying to tell me something. They all faced me, eyes beaming, cawing frantically. The only think I could think of was my ancestors. It lasted only a few minutes I believe, spooky indeed.

I’ve contemplated that experience many times over the years. On page seven in the Chronicle someone said, “Dude...those are our ancestors you are disparaging.” I don’t think these birds were crows or ravens but I got the same feeling that they were my ancestors. It baffles me to this day.

Anyhow, your publication is cool. I’m enclosing some postage stamps in hopes of being added to the list to receive future issues. I will send more later. Thank you kindly and have a nice day. With respect – *Corvi 526357, Sneads, Fla.*

Editor’s note: We appreciate this information. It seems especially thought provoking in light of recent finds of Corvi College’s Bureau of Demographic Studies. The BDS reports that there is a significant demographic correlation between people and black birds. For example, among the nations of the world China, India and the United States are leaders in terms of how many black birds and people live and – perhaps most importantly – die in them each year. BDR investigators now believe there is an intra-national, regional correlation. Again for example: Montana, Wyoming and the two Dakotas occupy approximately 12 percent of the total land area of this country. Yet these four states collectively have only 04.9 percent of the corvid and 01.1 percent of the human population of the United States. However, North Dakota is considered the safest state of our union and Wyoming the sixth healthiest. You want thought provoking?

## ON DISENCHANTMENT

Dear Corvis,

I just received CC No. 2 Fall 2010 Thanks! I really enjoy this publication.

RE: “Disenchanted” from Corvi #7911, it’s too bad this reader took himself off your mailing list because he observed crows attacking a lizard. I love reptiles too, but nature is pretty brutal sometimes from any respect.

Personally, I love the cawing and  
*Continued on next page*

*The Corvi Chronicle* is published irregularly by corvi who have an interest in or need for doing so for members of The American Society of Crows and Ravens and others. There is no subscription fee, but it is customary and seemly to send contributions to pay for production and mailing. There is a direct connection between contributions, the size of the Chronicle and its frequency of distribution. Those who do not choose to contribute will continue to receive the Chronicle and enjoy all membership privileges. However, they will no doubt suffer a loss of self-esteem and may occasionally be mocked by other corvis.

Members are reminded to make new corvi by duplicating and passing along issues of the Chronicle.

ASCAR has a home page or chat room on the Internet:

<http://www.ascaronline.org/>

Editor..... Corvi #68  
Art Directors .... Corvi #4, #14 #32 and #1310  
The Board .... Known only to themselves

The Chronicle accepts articles and manuscripts of reasonable length on any topic acknowledged by The Board, news clippings and general correspondence. Unused material will be returned in good time to the authors. Commentary (insightful, indignant or otherwise) should be addressed to:

ASCAR / CORVI CHRONICLE  
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croaking of crows and ravens (as well as the honks of geese and screeches of blue-jays) at any time of day. And if a crow dive bombed me I would find it most intriguing.

Anyway thank you for keeping you publication going. I live in the mountains, the lower elevations of the Sierras here in California, and I love it, snow and all.

I've enclosed a modest contribution to help out a bit. – *Corvi 1285 Pollock Pines, Calif.*

Gentlecorvi:

I am not as attracted to crows here in Oregon, as I was in Connecticut. Perhaps the conservative mind set of the people here is rubbing off on the crows? Anyway, I am interested in the letter of ex-corvi #7911, Corvi Chronicle Volume XXV Nov. 2, 2010.

When it comes to dive bombing birds, I think I'll have to take my hat off to the common Herring Gull. I had just picked up my "Flying Ace" garrison cap, brand new, at the Air Force's uniform outfitters. Wearing it proudly on my head, back to the barracks, one of the birds made direct hit on the Ace's patent leather bill. In the little time it took for me to complete the journey, the acidity had made a permanent cloudy patch no polish could eradicate or cover.

Dive bombing is a common tactic among birds protecting nests, young or injured birds on the ground. Crows have been known to utilize this display in many other ways, as proposed by those singled out for this attention.

It is my belief that to some extent crows can read the human mind, and I expect this particular crow detected that corvi 7911 was having inappropriate thoughts.

Thanking you for your kind attention, I am – *Corvi 790, Seaside, Ore.*

## LETTERS CONTINUED

### RETURNING FAVORS

Raucous Felicitations:

I have found an abundance of ravens and magpies in my new home. I feed them; they annoy dogs and frighten pigeons to return the favor. Their soaring songs please me, as does your newsletter. Thanks.

Enclosed is a pittance for your maintenance. I appreciate you. – *Corvi Green-eyed Raven, Taos, N.M.*

### RAZZLE UPDATE

Note from a bad corvi:

Enclosed please find my paltry (or pathetic, as the case may be...) contribution to help cover distribution costs for the Corvi Chronicle. Lifestyle changes, don't you know. Also an address and partial name change. Also .....I cannot even remember my corvi #. That's how bad I've been. One more request if you can. I was told by my sister that a new issue of the Chronicle has just been mailed. Any chance I could get you to send that to me? The story of Razzle in this last issue is important to me, as Razzle belongs to my sister. Or belonged, as the case may be. He decided to leave with his wild brethren in October and hasn't yet returned. I had a chance to meet him a year ago and he was indeed an incredible crow. Thanks in advance for your patience. – *Corvi ???, Fort Ann, N.Y.*

### GIFT RAP

Dear Corvi President, #1, Director, etc.:

I recently discovered your organization while searching online for a gift for my girlfriend, who is an amazing woman and an avid admirer of Crows and Ravens. She has Crow and Raven statues and artwork, and has even participated in local

Crow counts for the Audubon Society. Without question, she would be a worthy member of your organization. Please consider her for membership. – *Corvi 1374, Seattle, Wash.*

### MORE SOCIAL ANIMAL

Dear Corvi Chronicler

The neighborhood ravens make an impressive effort to coax me into being a more social animal. Perhaps with patience and careful study, I will begin to understand what they're saying. Perhaps not, but I'll enjoy their displays just the same.

Thank you for cobbling together the submissions of corvis. I look forward to finding the Chronicle in my letterbox one day. – *Corvi 80100, Los Angeles, Calif.*

### GRIEF

Dear Corvids devotees

I wish you all a very full and inspiring New Year.

Thank you so very much for the Corvi Chronicle, which I really do treasure and relate to.

My Angel (Arrkangel) of 12 years died July 20,2010. He had a brain tumor and in my 63 years no decision has/ever will be so pain filled or hard. I tried everything but in the end it was my greatest sacrifice to give him freedom from the tumor. My life centered around this breathtakingly beautiful and precious friend and as my friend, surrogate and only family. I have no way to fill the horrible absence in his passing. There is no love so precious and inspiring as that of a Raven.

Please accept my sincerest gratitude for you dear newsletter. – *Corvi 292, Victoria, Australia*

### STICKERS

Dear Sirs:

I have enjoyed Corvi Chronicle for several years now. I find it a delightful informative distraction from the everyday

*Continued on next page*

ASCAR now numbers — so think some who enjoy counting things — about 900 members. Alphabetically and in terms of interests and attitudes members range — an expression — from academics to Zoroastrians. But only the Editor and an associate minion know who and where they all are. This is in keeping with the Corvi Privacy Act that forbids those who know from talking about or to other corvis or using their names and addresses in the Chronicle without permission. The CPA is occasionally tested by purveyors of crow curios wanting access to mailing lists.

## PRIVACY ACT

However, because many members have similar interests and have indicated a desire to make the acquaintance of others who share them, some thought has been given to adjusting the CPA to accommodate these wishes. Therefore anyone who would like to hear from other corvi should send along their name and address to the editor. These will be published occasionally in the Chronicle. Names are not absolutely necessary — Corvi numbers will do — but addresses are. Obviously those who wish to remain known only to the editor and her associate minion should do nothing and will continue to enjoy the protection of CPA.

## LETTERS CONTINUED

life on our tumultuous planet!

My last check was returned uncashed, found by your new secretary amongst old correspondence. Hopefully she has “cleaned house” by this.

Continue your excellent publication. Could I be assigned a number please? – *Corvi 221, McLean, Va.*

P.S. Do you know anyone who prints and sells crow name and address stickers? I’m sure many would be interested.

### BETTER DAY

ASCAR

Always a better day when I find a Corvi Chronicle in the mailbox. I never tire of watching them and their smaller cousins, the jays ... *Corvi 622, Cherryfield, Maine*

### COMING HOME TO ROOST

Dear ASCAR

I am applying for membership to your exclusive and

particularly elite society. Your website became known to me via the author of a Star Tribune article (Sept. 1, 2010) “Crows are nature’s scamps” (Val Cunningham) after I shared photos and some personal and intimate (though not illegal or embarrassing) with crows. – *Corvi 1910, Minnesota*

ASCAR

I’m coming home to roost! Please add us to your flock.

– *Corvi 11, Bellingham, Wash.*

Dear Fellow Raveniers, Corvidae, etc., etc.

We would be ravenously interested in becoming members. Our house is full of birds (parrots mostly) and being bird loving kindred spirits too, we feel it would be appropriate.

I would also like to request a tape of Corvid Tales and have enclosed a cheque to help defer any postage costs. – *Corvi 920, San Diego, Calif.*

Artist Karen Bondarchuk of Kalamazoo kindly gave permission to use “In Defense of a Stolen Golf Ball,” her 6 by 3.5-foot ink and charcoal drawing of a defiant raven. Read more about the influence of crows and ravens on Bondarchuk’s work on page 6.



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