



The Professor's Crow

The Professor, while aware of the pitfalls of anthropomorphism, cannot avoid drawing some conclusions from his personal observations of our neighbors in the animal kingdom. For reasons too complex for my thin mind and this short piece, I find myself strangely drawn in sympathy and spirit to crows. I know folks who, if their home furnishings and knick knacks give evidence, are duck people, dog people, cat people, bear people, and even cow and hippopotamus people! I favor crows. Many hate crows. That's their affair. I am not an owl.

Crows scavenge. So do eagles and hawks. I've never been quite so keen on raptor birds of the upper air. Their lofty and aloof nature shows a patrician disdain for things going on down here closer to the ground where we mix our affairs with crows and sparrows. Crows seem more like us. They indulge in petty spats and squabbles. They hang out in gaggles, gossiping and chatting over a snack of pizza crust or a scrap of cookie.

I watch them commute to their daily occupations, traversing the same route day after day from their roosts in the hills. At gloaming, they return, ghosting through the pink-green alder corpses in the creek bottom, whirling and wheeling like ashes from a fire. They have purpose, a pattern, an occupation, that has rhythm and regularity. They travel as a body, a Dark Clan perpetually on the hunt and peck.

Certain crow qualities deserve emulation, to my mind. A common sight in wood, village, and pasture is a crow family unit, a puffy black bowling-pin youngster and its parents sharing a perch for some social time. They nudge and snuggle one another, nurturing. Crows hang tough against adversity. An external threat to one is a challenge to all, and they league together in fearless courage to roust intruders and enemies. Countless times I have seen what Ms. Sally Lackaff refers to as a "Murder of Crows" band together to assail a potential enemy, a nest robbing raccoon or eagle. Clouds of crows materialize magically in these circumstances, drawn from far reaches of the crow domain within instants. The haranguing din of hundreds of righteously indignant crows is frightening in its volume and intensity. Crows seem to have an airspace, a sort of sky territory. Interlopers, regardless of size or potential danger to a crow, are dealt with summarily. Crows will have a go at bald eagles or hawks, mano a mano, without hesitation. Their courage appears limitless. Crows, like good Marines, remain at the side of fallen comrades. An injured crow can expect assistance, or at least compassion, from his kind. Several times in recent years I've watched as a crow in terrible straits has been attended by another. Many people on the subways of New York City might hope for as much consideration.

Crows appear able to survive, indeed thrive, in this late part of the Twentieth Century. Their numbers, like our own, are like sands of the sea. They are tough and canny as individuals, yet can live harmoniously in close proximity to countless numbers of their peers. Crows (rats as well) relish the carrion and junk food products that have become the mainstay of contemporary life.

Perhaps crows have something to teach us. I can only speculate.



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