

American Crow



Everyone knows crows. These highly social and intelligent birds are found nearly everywhere humans are found, and are always conspicuous. If you see a large black bird in town, particularly if you see a group of them, you are almost certainly looking at American Crows. American Crows are almost always found in family groups, or larger flocks. The "caw" call is one of the few bird calls that nearly everyone recognizes.

But don't fall into the trap of assuming that every large, black bird you see is an American Crow. We also have Common Ravens in our area, mostly outside town. Ravens are about half again larger than crows, but with proportionally longer and more slender wings. They are more graceful fliers, and while crows always beat their wings steadily and "row" their way across the sky, ravens will glide and soar as well. If you catch one gliding or soaring you will likely be able to see the one unmistakable field mark for identifying them (if you can't put a ruler next to them to gauge their size): A wedge shaped or pointed tail. Crows have a squared off tail.

Despite seemingly being everywhere, American Crows seldom come to bird feeders. This may be because they eat nearly everything, and don't need helpful humans to put out food for them.

Crows are very clever. They will follow other animals around that may lead them to food, they will work in pairs where one crow distracts a target while the other steals food it was guarding, and they will sometimes make and use simple tools.

Despite how often they are seen at roadkills, American Crows are not able to eat most carrion without help. They may have large bills, but they actually can't break through the skin of even a squirrel. So they have to wait for carrion to rot enough that they can get into, or wait for other carrion eaters to open up the carcass. So when you see them at roadkills, this is just another example of crows being clever – they've figured out that the dead animal has been ripped apart enough by traffic so they can eat it.