

# Corvid Chronicle

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## READER SERVICES

### ASCAR advises

For obvious reasons the Board of ASCAR periodically employs Digital Optimum Demographics, Inc. (a well-known consulting contractor for the DOD) to surreptitiously survey the membership of our organization. Though the analysis of it remains incomplete, 2006 data indicates that individuals who were last investigated five or more years ago have grown significantly older. The following reader service feature is published in response to this trend and, of course, security concerns.

#### PLAN AHEAD

Planning for lung transplants should begin on or shortly after one's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. In most jurisdictions pre-used lungs are not available – unless the patient has very high connections – for those who are 55 years or old. – *From Modern Morbidity Magazine*

#### NATURAL RHYTHMS

Plant no trees, deciduous or evergreen which will not flower (if that is their habit) or provide adequate shade for a small table and a comfort-

able chair within two growing seasons. Consult your local nurseryman. – *From The American Association of Nurserymen.*

#### DEVELOP GOOD

##### HOBBIES

Search antique stores until you locate a genuine fountain pen. Purchase it and a bottle of black ink. At least once a week use these materials to write to a friend whose neglect has caused self-loathing. The letter must be legible, as free of platitudes as possible, and express some true sentiments. It should contain at least two original observations and several well constructed sentences...

Hang around chain book stores and on the sly conceal works of radio talk show hosts by hiding them behind those of Henry James, the Government Printing Office and so on.

##### BE PRUDENT

When walking in an unfamiliar forest without a compass or calendar, one should always carry a duck and small packet of wet moss. With these items individuals, when lost, can, as the

saying goes, "get their bearings." First throw moss against a large tree. It will stick to the north side of the trunk. Then release the duck who will fly north in the spring and south in the fall. Do not enter unfamiliar forests in the winter or summer. Never enter treeless places. – *From "Saving Yourself, Intelligent Survival," by Dr. Mark Fail, DDS*

##### BE CHARITABLE

Telephone sales persons have terribly unpleasant jobs. Rather than talking nasty or abruptly hanging up the phone, make pleasant, sympathetic conversation with these unfortunates. Ask about their families or sexual activities; about their general hopes, fears and ambitions. Find out where they live. If it is in a place one often visits, offer to stop by one day and buy them lunch. Inquire about the weather in Omaha, Sydney, Bombay or wherever they may be. You will feel the better for it and, perhaps, so will they. – *From "Ramirez II"*

##### UNCLUTTER THE MIND

Each evening forget at least one object, happening, name and face which is no longer of any possible interest. Removing clutter from mental attics clears space in which better

keepsakes may be stored or attractively displayed. – *From "The Sayings of Chairman Ley"*

##### READ GOOD

One of the most difficult of all things to endure for a crow, a raven, a wolf or a human is to feel alone and separated from one's own kind. A sense of belonging is one of the most universal of all feelings. – *From Lawrence Kilham.*

Fate is not an eagle. It creeps like a rat. – *From Elizabeth Bowen*



Corvidae stamps by Mike Hess, Seattle, Wash.

# Fare thee well

“Pack up  
the moon  
and  
dismantle  
the sun,”

from the dirge,  
*Stop all the clocks* by  
W.H. Auden



Watercolor by Gerda daRif

## DWIGHT CHAMBERLAIN

Some Chronicle readers knew and many more knew of Dwight Chamberlain, a national authority on the corvids. Departing from Scottsburg, Ind., he has passed on after 68 years here. In addition to those in many publications of federal and state agencies, conservation and academic institutions, technical papers by Chamberlain appear in the volume, *Ravens, Crows, Magpies and Jays*. With a companion raven, Rolph, he lectured and made TV appearances to promote intelligent interest in and good behavior toward the corvids.

## ANDREW J. SPEER

Andrew L. Sperr and his son, A.J. Sperr, located and carefully observed a 5,000 or-so-bird crow roost in Orange County, New York. They reported on this roost in the Spring 2004 issue of the Chronicle. A.J. Sperr was a trooper with the New York State Police.

Last year while making what was thought to be a routine traffic stop he was shot four times and killed by two men who a short time before had been involved in a bank robbery. Both murderers were captured, convicted and now, according to Andrew L. Sperr, have been imprisoned for life.

## EDWARD ROBINSON

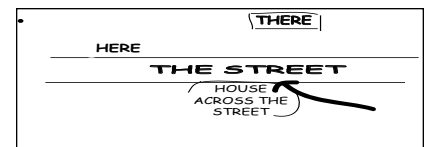
Dear Fellow Corvi,

My late husband Edward Robinson subscribed to your publication. While it was his subscription, when it arrived, we shared it. Ed passed away on Valentine's Day 2006 and I lost track of it a bit this past year; but then it arrived yesterday and I felt it was time to read it cover to cover by myself. Thus, I am sending a donation so that the publication will continue to arrive with regular frequency, afford me an intact self-esteem, and diminish the chances of occasional mockery. Thank you for all you do, whoever you are.

The following is a love story

I lived, “HERE.”

He lived, “THERE.”



We never met until I moved to, “THE HOUSE ACROSS THE STREET.”

I needed someone to pick up the last month's rent on “HERE.”

Unbeknownst to me he had gotten the same realtor because her phone number was the year of his birth, 1940.

She suggested I call him and ask him if he wanted to rent my place.

He liked my voice on the message machine so he called back immediately.

He came over late at night to check out the place, but he was really checking out me.

## Fare thee well

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Our first conversation was about ex-spouses, kids, and crows! I told him my ex-husband hated crows but I didn't care because I loved crows and hated my ex-husband. He said, and this I will never forget, "I'm really glad to hear you say that. In fact, my license plate says, 'CORVID,' which, of course includes crows and birds related to this family."

We talked for over an hour, which is significant because as I said, it was very late. He went home and I knew I liked him. He said he would come over Sunday to help me move. I was only moving across the street (see map).

He did help me move. Later that next week, he showed up with a clock. It remains on our kitchen wall to this day. The picture on the front of the accompanying card, an artistic rendition of a single crow, and the poem on the back:

*Crow is calling  
Like the pine in the wind.  
Look within.  
Look within.*

Ten magical years later, this poem became the first line of his eulogy. He was my mate. The one I had waited for all my life. The real deal. We never anticipated it would end so soon ... cancer.

The night before he died, he told me, "You are my heart."

"And you mine." I told him.

As we drove up to the place where we would make our promises, the sky filled with crows. "A sign," we said to each other. "They are happy for us, came to wish us well."

He had already rescued, "Boston" before I met him. This crow showed up the same time every morning, making a racket outside our bedroom window. The only time the man didn't complain about being woken up too early was when this bird doubled as his alarm clock. Boston would follow us as we walked the dog, caw from the tree adjacent to our back yard, and from time to time, bring his family to visit. Then he left for a while. Strangely enough, just before the devastating diagnosis, we noticed the crow's return. Soon after, life changed by way of a final separation.

They flew by the stained glass window of the church during the eulogy. They showed up in the back yard one morning as I sat in his chair and no longer held back the tears. Now, they come every morning, just two of them, the same two of them. They make an awful racket if I am late with the food. They are beautiful against the snow, and every other backdrop. Just as in our first conversation when I told him how much I loved them, I love them and I love him still. I have no doubt, none at all, they are fully aware of the comfort they bring. Until we are together again, they are our connection and the witnesses to our story. — Julia

Enclosed is a book of poems that Ed wrote over the years. Feel free to use them if you wish. One year, I selected some of the poems and made a book for Ed as a gift for Father's Day. I had my fifth graders illustrate the book, each child illustrating a poem they chose from the selections. We had a public reading of the book for Ed at "circle time" and Ed was reduced to tears. It's one of my best memories.

## CROW FEATHERS *Observations and poems by Edward Robinson*

**C**row Feathers is a compilation of behavioral observations, crow thoughts and wisdom gathered from nature and the literature. They are meant to provide insight into the world of the American Crow.

They were written for "Crow People," those who love these ubiquitous black birds. Each "feather" has been gathered and stored over the years. Some come from my back yard, others from our woodlot. Some come from history books and others from Indian lore.

Like the bouquet of feathers in the old cut glass ink well on my desk, these are "feathers" of all shapes and sizes. Mostly crow feathers, but some from other species

that share their lives with my family and the neighborhood flock.

The history of crows is a long one, much older and longer than ours. They are our companions on this Earth. One hundred and fourteen species exist around the world. They have suffered war, famine, plagues and death.

As they live and die, so do we.

### *Dedication*

I dedicate this little book of verse to Julia, my loving wife. She has patiently supported my research and "feather" foibles. Her kindness to Boston Blackie, a crow, once and always wild that I helped raise and she adopted on our marriage has made my heart glad.

(first poem)

Rising Sun bird,  
Dawn to Dusk bird.  
Twilight bird.  
Moonlit night bird.  
In the Springtime  
a crow flies North  
to Freedom  
Following the Polar Star.  
Moonrise,  
Mockingbird son.  
Sunrise,  
Crows roll out the dawn.  
Corn bread  
Corn pone  
Cob pipes  
Husk dolls and crows.  
Snake fences.  
Tattered Scarecrow.  
Tobacco worms.  
Green thumbs and beaks.

Done fly away.  
Left the Flock.  
Traveling alone,  
free at last.  
Clay pipe stories.  
Blunderbusses and bibles.  
Starving times  
and laughing crows.  
Tomahawk claim,  
Corn fields and cabins.  
Encroachments  
on the Crow frontier  
Indian path,  
bleaching bones.  
Braddock's feast  
So the crows say.  
Crow say Caw  
No hem and haw.  
No say Crow say  
haw haw haw.



## THE TALK OF THE ROOST

### SOULS OF LOST SCOUTMASTERS

Corvi 1,182 of Spirit Lake, Ida., sent a column by Paul Turner published in the Spokane (Wash.)-Review from October 2005 with crow tales submitted by his readers. In an earlier column Turner had complained that crows seemed to know when he was attempting to nap and likely were the cause of thuds on the roof that disturbed his naptime. Turner theorized the crows were taking apples from the tree in his backyard and dropping them on the rooftop to break them open. When the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife suggested setting up a camera to obtain photographic evidence, Turner felt that the crows knew he had been critical of their singing voices in particular and that he regarded them as an Alfred Hitchcock mob in general. Turner reasoned that he was dealing with a vengeful intelligence and that a camera would only provoke more mob action. Thus he took no action beyond writing his column.

His readers responded with their own tales of crow intelligence. Pamela Pschirrer regarded crows as uncanny. Her miniature schnauzer, Mister Asterbilt, had rushed outside one September morning after watching crows descend to the backyard and chased each away. Mister Asterbilt returned to the house and leapt into Pschirrer's lap panting heavily yet satisfied with his work. "Suddenly we heard a tick, tick, tick from above." In

the skylight Pschirrer saw a couple of crows tapping the glass.

"I swear they were just taunting Mister for chasing them because they were looking directly at him."

Another reader implied crows could recognize a rifle in predawn light. It seems her father-in-law had once borrowed her husband's rifle to scare off a crow that would begin cawing at 4 a.m. outside a lake residence. When her father-in-law prepared to fire the gun in the predawn, "The crow saw the rifle, flew off and shut up forever more with not a shot fired."

Julie Wilkerson remembered crows as harvesting pecans from a tree in the yard when her family lived in Oklahoma. "We'd never see crows in our yard until the pecans ripened. Then a bunch of enormous crows would show up to harvest for us." The crows dropped the hulls on the rooftop of their home to open them. "They made quite a racket but at least they didn't eat at night."

David Townsend advised: never taunt crows. "It is a scientifically proven fact – at least among my people and several other cultures – that crows are, in fact, the souls of former hunters, warriors and Scoutmasters who became lost in the wilderness. I find it advisable to greet these birds with a respectful, 'Good day, brother crow,' and recommend that you do so as well. Gulls and pigeons, on the other hand, are really just flying rats, so you can pretty much say whatever you like."

Turner gave the last word to Vince Eberly who wrote: You have to be suspicious of an animal whose group is referred to as a murder."

### ARTIC MADNESS

In a July 2006 column by Dermot Cole in the Fairbanks (Alaska) Daily News-Miner sent to us by Corvi 888 of Ester, Alaska, we learned that a raven brought a young biologist George Schaller to the attention of Kay, the coed who would become his wife, when the two were University of Alaska students in the early 1950s. Today George is an internationally recognized biologist and author and is director of science at Wildlife Conservation International, part of the New York Zoological Society.

As a student, George had created a flap when he pitched a tent on the campus to study ravens. University history has it that the young biologist tented near faculty housing prompting some faculty wives to complain to then university president Terris Moore. They objected to Schaller's "communing with ravens that he had trained to land on him for food," according to *The College Hill Chronicles*, written by Neil Davis. The university president may have thought Schaller's methods unusual but recognized creative talent. The president calmed the faculty spouses by explaining that Schaller was "involved in an official university project that required him to live in the tent and

*Continued on page 5*

## TALK *continued*

talk to the ravens.”

Thus Schaller stayed with his tent, which apparently was also near a women’s dormitory. His wife, Kay Schaller, recalled some years later in an article she wrote for *International Wildlife*: “In my dormitory I suddenly heard this bellowing and shouting. And I looked out the window and there was this fellow down there looking up at the sky and shaking his fist. I’d been raised in Alaska from the time I was 10, and I kept thinking, ‘This must be Artic madness.’ Suddenly this big bird came down and landed on his arm. That was George, and I recognized him as the fellow in all those classes with me and I was absolutely fascinated.”

### PARK RANGER

#### AND [ravenidiot.com](http://ravenidiot.com)

Corvi 2/3 of Fort Union, N.M., sent an article by Terry McEaney, staff ornithologist for Yellowstone National Park, that was published in the *Montana Best Times*, March 2007. McEaney is author of three books: *Birding Montana*, *Birds of Yellowstone* and *The Uncommon Loon* and is working on a fourth to be titled, “Lucky Feathers – Adventures and Experiences of a Yellowstone

Ornithologist.” The article was an excerpt from his book in progress and we found additional excerpts on McEaney’s website: [ravenidiot.com](http://ravenidiot.com).

McEaney regularly warns park visitors not to feed ravens because they can be as destructive as they are inquisitive and playful. “Once you give into the captivation of playful raven tricks, you are sucked into the vacuum of wildlife deception.” He offered an example of a couple he once observed tossing bread scraps to ravens from their pickup truck cab parked in a Yellowstone lot. McEaney cautioned them that feeding wildlife in Yellowstone is illegal. The couple responded they were merely having lunch. McEaney later observed the ravens that had enjoyed the bread scraps had alighted on the pickup – one picking insects off the grill, another playing with the windshield wipers and two more hopping and sliding down the windshield. As McEaney drove away, one raven was tearing the rubber lining from the pickup’s windshield.

McEaney was once asked to investigate multiple reports of stolen windshield wipers from vehicles parked near a specific trailhead. Ravens were suspect. He found that most of the pillaged cars had been parked overnight and that the drivers had raised up the wipers to prevent



finding them frozen to the windshield. Ravens at play had taken that precaution to another level by removing the wipers rubber inserts entirely.

As mentioned in the previous edition of the Chronicle, Yellowstone ravens have

learned that snowmobiles likely have food stored in compartments beneath the seats. Further they have learned to lift the Velcro flaps of the storage compartments to help themselves. In 2003, Yellowstone authorities declared visitors should not leave any food or valuables in the storage seat or in their packs attached to snowmobiles. Ravens continued to lift flaps but were unrewarded. According to McEaney the very ranger who proposed that visitors cease and desist storing food in snowmobiles reported the ravens may have clearly communicated their view of the no-food-storage edict. The ranger had just picked up new green “Park Ranger” vehicle decals at a ranger station, put them in her snowmobile pack and stepped back inside the station for a minute. When she returned, ravens had unzipped the snowmobile pack and were busy pecking at something in the snow. “After she chased the birds off, there in the snow was a Park Ranger decal. The “R” was demolished so badly the decal now read ‘Park anger.’”

## *Joe the Crow: a summer morning memory*

Heather Trexler Remoff sent the following excerpt from her book *February Light: A Love Letter to the Seasons during a Year of Cancer and Recovery*, published by St. Martin’s Press. She gave permission to reprint the following from her memoir:

Joe the Crow came to us out of the sky. I was 11 at the time, a shy, skinny kid with an unruly mop of tangled curls. My sisters and I liked to sleep late. However, our slothful summer habits came to an end in the two weeks that Joe transformed our lives. One Saturday, Daddy, an early riser with a loud determination to win converts to the cause of daybreak mornings, had given up on the three of us and gone berry picking on his own. We lived in the country, and the acreage around us held a brambled mass of wild

blackberry bushes.

By his own telling, Daddy had wedged himself into the center of one such blackberry field and, minus bucket or pail, was picking berries with one hand and piling them into the extended palm of his other. Suddenly, a large crow dropped from the heavens and landed on his outstretched forearm. Joe had arrived.

Joe had a dazzling array of tricks and a quickly established reputation for petty theft. He could bounce a small rubber ball across our stone terrace. He filled an empty Good & Plenty box with pebbles and shook it like a rattle. He would steal any shiny object and fly with it to the top of the walnut tree in our side yard. But, as far as our father was concerned, his best trick of all was his prompt arrival every morning just at dawn. He would

land on the porch roof and move between Sandy’s bedroom window and mine, pecking on the panes until we got up and came out to play with him. He’d stay for an hour or so and then, seemingly unable to ignore any longer the cawing harassment of the wild crows that circled overhead, would fly off with his companions.

Then one day he just didn’t show up, and we never saw him again. It is easy to speculate on Joe’s origins as a hand-raised fledgling. His death was at human hands as well. Some weeks later, we learned that a neighboring farmer had been surprised by a “rabid crow” one morning while feeding the chickens. Mr. Jenkins ran for his shotgun, and our dear Joe’s life ended in an explosion of black feathers.

# ROOST NOTES *To or Not to foster*

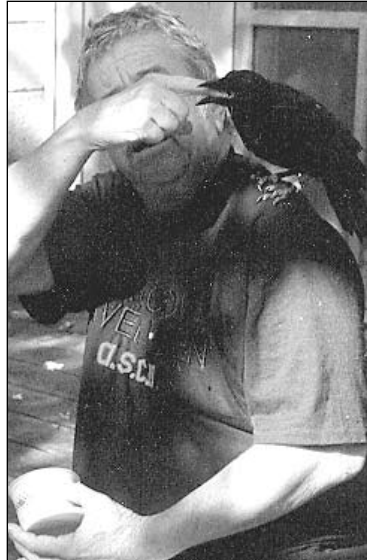
Often in the spring or early summer, young crows are prematurely ejected from their nests because of storms, tree pruning, overcrowding or other accident. Unable to fly, feed or otherwise fend for themselves they huddle on the ground or in brush until they are taken by a predator, die of exposure or starvation. (Crows are excellent parents but generally pay little attention to grounded nestlings who for them are inevitable goners.)

Encountering such a young bird a person has several options. 1) Ignore it. 2) Either to put it out of its supposed misery or because this gives a certain satisfaction the person can kill the bird. 3) Pick up the crow and take it to a competent wildlife rehabilitator if there is a local one. 4) Take the foundling home to care for until it can be released.

A POINT OF EMPHASIS: What follows is *not advice* about choosing between these options. The purpose here is to bring up some things which follow if one chooses the fourth option, to foster a foundling crow. The consequences of the other three options are self-evident.

☉ In the United States it is at least a misdemeanor to hold – no matter how kindly the intention – any live native mammal or bird (and some others) without state and federal permits, the obtaining of which is usually a slow process and often an aggravating one. Overall these are necessary and benign regulations which prohibit selling our fauna in pet shops (as once was the case) or being used as living baits, targets or commercial displays. However, as crows especially illustrate the devil is in the details. In most states licensed hunters may legally kill crows by the hundreds throughout most of the year. It is ironic to say the least, that caring for an orphaned crow is a criminal act. (In practice regulations about keeping a crow are usually only enforced if there are complaints from neighbors or if the local game warden is underemployed and mean spirited.)

☉ When population dynamics are considered in the abstract caring for a young crow with hopes of releasing it is ecologically irrelevant. But neither crows or people live in the abstract, a matter upon which Loren Eiseley once addressed very effectively. Walking along a beach with a friend, Eiseley



found a still living starfish. Picking up the animal he waded out into the water and released it. The friend said he couldn't see how doing so made any difference. The philosopher/naturalist answered, "It does for that one." All wildlife and for that matter other sorts of rehabilitation are based on that humane (in the most literal sense) premise.

☉ Compared to other parentless infants, crows, being sturdy, adaptable omnivores, are relatively easy to deal with. In the nesting stage – as foundlings typically are – they beg incessantly for food and eat every hour or so. There have been notes in previous Chronicles about crow chow but a good quality dry (kibble-like), puppy food after being soaked makes a handy, sustaining diet for a foundling. Such things as lean, ground beef heart, minced hard boiled eggs, a bit of cooked rice or oatmeal may be added. Whatever the mix it should be gooey enough to stick to the end of a finger. Foundlings gape

when approached. Dip a finger into the food mix and put it into their mouth. The finger simulates a beak and stimulates swallowing. Nestlings get moisture from food but later need clean drinking water. They soon become enthusiastic bathers and will do so in a shallow pan if open water is not otherwise available. After infancy crows eat more or less anything which does not eat them. Arthur Cleveland Bent (*...North American Jays, Crows and Titmice*, p. 237) reported that the menu of crow foods includes at least 650 items.

☉ Inevitably a foundling crow raised by people will be imprinted on them. Imprinting is the bonding process through which infant creatures develop trust in others. Obviously in most circumstances the others are parents. Among American crows, nestlings are tended by parents but also, often, by adult non-breeding "helper" birds. Perhaps in consequence foundling crows readily bond with people in general as well as their primary care givers. Because of imprinting foundlings are charming and companionable but later this may cause problems (of which more shortly) for both the crow and its people.

☉ The wings of a young crow fledge out before the tail. This sequence has developed for good reason. After they become too large and active to remain in the nest young crows move out of it and perch in the top of the home tree or

ROOST NOTES *continued**A crow's gift*

nearby ones. At this stage they are descriptively called branchers. They can then fly but are clumsy and timid about making descending flights because their tails – which are critical for maneuvering and braking – are insufficiently developed. Because of this branchers tend to remain relatively safe in a treetop near the nest where they can be easily located and fed – as they still need to be – by adults.

The brancher stage is a tricky one for foundlings and people fostering them. The bird is no longer content to sit in a box begging, eating and dozing. But for a time it must still be somewhat confined or it will hop, skip and flap its way into trouble – e.g. onto a rooftop or well up into a tree. Often tough love is enough to resolve the situation. After several hours the foundling may become truly hungry and work up enough nerve to thrash and belly-flop its way down into a bush or onto the ground to be fed. However, fearing to leave one out all night – in owl time – people have climbed extension ladders to rescue brancher crows.

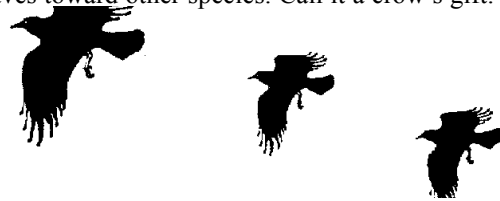
There is no need for further confinement after full flight powers have developed. (Permanently caging a young crow for its protection is about the same as locking up a teenager in a closet. As a rule a free-flying foundling will remain for a month or so within 200 or 300 yards of where it was cared for and with the people who did the caring. It will continue to beg but is fed less and less often. This replicates the normal “weaning” process. In the wild branchers continue to call for food but as they scatter away from the nest site adult crows are less able and inclined to oblige them. In reactive desperation young ones began picking up and playing with all sorts of objects and learn what is and is not edible. In the case of a foundling it may fiddle and – when it becomes able – fly off with not only sticks and pebbles, but nails, small tools, car keys, unfastened wrist watches, pencils, new bedding plants, gobs of picnic potato salad and so on and so on. This can be aggravating but also leads to an appreciation (as many Chronicle readers have testified) of what a surprising, instructive and delightful creature a young crow is.

As will wild counterparts, a free foundling will increase its range incrementally and become bolder in behavior. Consequently if there are near neighbors a bird imprinted on

people is likely to visit them. Some may enjoy having a crow fly down and light on their shoulder or bury bottle caps in a petunia bed. However those who are not aware or care about its origins may think this unnatural, scary behavior which warrants killing the bird, calling a game warden or animal control agent. To be blunt: In conventional urban or suburban residential areas fostering attempts generally end badly for both crows and the people involved. The chances of success are poor unless a ten-or-so acre friendly flight zone is available.

An imprinted foundling will usually remain companionable through the summer but as the season wanes will be absent from its home base for increasingly longer periods. If all goes well the bird will tentatively commence associating with wild crows and sometime in the fall disappear – hopefully – with them. There are only a very few indisputable reports of foundlings subsequently returning to the locations and people where they were fostered. From the little available anecdotal evidence their survival rate is probably very low. A fostered crow is a retarded one in terms of its education; poorly prepared to cope with the real crow world. But this does not deny or alter the significance of Loren Eiseley's observation.

A three-week-old, flightless, hungry crow huddled on the ground has a life expectancy of only a few hours. If successfully fostered it will have at least a pretty good summer. The bird's experiences will be much different than those of a wild contemporary but given the intelligence, appetite and attitudes of crows those of the imprinted one may be at least satisfying. As for people, fostering a summer crow is among the best and unharmed ways to satisfy what C.S. Lewis identified as your “yearning to know other bloods.” According to much testimony it is an experience – legal or illegal – which often has a lasting, visceral influence on how one thinks, cares about and behaves toward other species. Call it a crow's gift.



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/>

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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  
KAW RIVER VALLEY ROOST  
BOX 1423  
LAWRENCE KS 66044-8423

## NURTURED

March 8, 2007

I especially was touched by Corvi 951 from Mashpee, Mass. Having rescued baby crows over the past 25 years or so, I always wondered if they were able to feel gratitude. Now I know they are, and I am equally grateful for having been enriched by having nurtured them.

I don't remember my Corvi number – I never held much stock in numbers, I guess. Can I just be Corvi Zoe?

Thanks for maintaining an informing, erudite newsletter. I am always delighted by it! – *Corvi Zoe, Nevada, Iowa, roost*

## NIGERIAN ENCOUNTER

I thought you might find this of interest, from the Nigerian Nobel Prize winning (1986) writer Wole Soyinka, recorded in his recent memoir, *You Must Set Forth At Dawn* (Random House, 2006). He attributes the account only to “a journalist,” but seems to suggest that he too has witnessed similar behaviors:

[A] strange encounter from those idyllic days underscores the flight of marvels and the end of the holy hour. It was recorded by a journalist, and I had myself witnessed variants of such enlightenment from “dumb beasts” on the road. I have a distinct recollection of this solemn choreography, once not far from Akure, and then further north, between Jebba and Kaura Namoda.

A crow had been killed by a motor vehicle and then, in what seemed like a practiced ritual, the corpse was surrounded by the other crows. One after the other, they landed, then began to circle the stricken bird in deliberate formaton. After a



## LETTERS

while, they stopped, moved nearer the lifeless form in what appeared to be a tightening of the circle, closing the gap between them and the corpse. They they began a chorus of cawing, moving their beaks up and down in unison – it was a kind of ordered ululating, and the eerie scene looked strangely like some kind of service being held over their slain companion. Shortly after, they lifted the corpse with their beaks, taking little hops, until the entire gathering had disappeared with the corpse over the verge. (pp. 51-52) Submitted by *Corvi 6060, Portage, Mich.*

## CORVUS SMARTS

Dear Corvi's:

My handwriting caused the Chronicle to inadvertently spell my handle incorrectly: it's *C. frugivorus Bartram*. However, I thought since of a better solution. From now on I'm Corvi 2.58 (I'll try another number if already taken.) Unless you are a professional or amateur statistician, the number has no significance. It's the  $z$  distribution number that indicates  $p = 0.05$ , often times the minimal acceptable probability (95 percent) for a behavior, number, etc., but in ecology less significant probabilities are accepted because of field realities (Wiens, J.A. The ecology of

bird communities).

Our crow literature, whether a good library book or the published scientific literature, says that American Crows (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) and Jungle Crows (*Corvus macrorhynchos*), and perhaps other species, like urban human refuse most as a food source, then invertebrates, including those in urban and suburban lawns [stet]. Even though both are originally forest species, they have hyperadapted to the smorgasbords left by humans and the breeding predator safety of their neighborhoods. Crow cultural innovation, because Corvidae brains have one of the highests brain masses to body mass ratios of all birds (Reckless, R.E., *Wilson Bulletin* 116 (2): 119-133, 2004), has caused a commensally (one species gains while the other doesn't) symbiotic feeding relationship between crows, other corvids and humans. The Gray Jay since Thoreau's time and earlier has been known as the “picnic and campsite robber,” often quickly snatching food like bacon right out of the hands when humans are not looking, which takes timing and learned skill. They also have learned to be a passenger on the bow tips of canoes.

Making the garbage more sanitary will not necessarily decrease roosts because crow culture is fast to innovate toward another hominid food source. Killing members of a roost will definitely not work because of supply and demand, ecology and population demography rules. In other words, over the long term, healthy remaining crows will take advantage of the more available food and other resources and reproduce more.

*Continued on next page*

**SILVER CROW**  
Jewelry ART  
...and other interesting things...  
MACKINAW CROSSINGS  
Mackinaw City, MI 49723  
231.432.7494  
www.silvercrow.net

**J. Ransom's Crows Nest**  
Promoting Artisans with Disabilities  
P.O. Box 1184 · Topeka, Kansas 66601  
(785) 234-2215 or 640-6949

## DOING-BUSINESS-AS *Corvi*

Corvid business cards received in mail:

- Silver Crow jewelry, art and other interesting things, Mackinaw Crossings, Mich.
- J. Ransom's CrowsNest, promoting artisans with disabilities in Topeka, Kan.
- Raven Gallery of Peshawbestown, specializing in Native American Fine Arts in Omena, Mich..
- Raven's Nest worldly goods shop in Kalamazoo, Mich

Joseph C. Raphael  
Judith C. Raphael  
**Raven Gallery**  
of Peshawbestown  
specializing in Native American Fine Arts  
3078 N.W. Bayshore Dr.  
P.O. Box 165  
616-271-2643

**RAVEN'S NEST**  
*Raven's Nest*  
Ryann Lambay  
Jodi Wilterdink  
Owners  
1444 Lake Drive S.E.  
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49506  
616.458.4113  
146 S. Kalamazoo MALL  
Kalamazoo, Michigan 49007  
616.344.NEST  
Worldly Goods

## LETTERS *continued*

Lastly, I am investigating the hypothesis that American Crows display occasionally not only cooperative breeding, but COOPERATING FEEDING. Selective feeding already has been documented. Crows, for example, as proven by the eight-year-old son of John Marzluff, prominent world crow biologist at the University of Washington, readily distinguish McDonald's fries in a McDonald's bag from fried potatoes made at home in an unmarked bag, only a few meters away, preferring Mickey Dee's fat-soaked fries that a substantial portion of us like so much. I define cooperative feeding in crows as "mutual." In other words when a sentinel comes down from a perch to feed in the group, at least one from the ground ascends to replace it, sentinel-ing "exchange." Feed corn, or cracked corn from the grocery store, will be used, maybe even a dead deer in a local refuge. I have a spot right outside my window all year long in Bethlehem if the police cooperate. I am asking any and all Corvi's to contribute observations to the project, however opportunistic, at the below address. All that needs to be said is "coop. feeding observed, X no. of times (even if once), in (urban, suburban, exurban, rural) setting" and your true name if you wish to be acknowledged in the journal article, on a postcard ... or you can contact me at any of the below unless you wish to remain anonymous. Thank you very much! --  
*Corvi 2.58, Director and 14-Year Amateur Ornithologist, Open Space Consultants, 946 Seneca St., Suite 11, Bethlehem, PA 18015*

*Em Surnia ulula* [caparoch@verizon.net](mailto:caparoch@verizon.net)  
 Amateur ornithology research URL,  
 PAHawkowl :  
<http://pahawkowl.livejournal.com>

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.

However, because many members have similar interests and have

## BOOKS

### *Ravens inspire birds and beads themes for fabric artist*

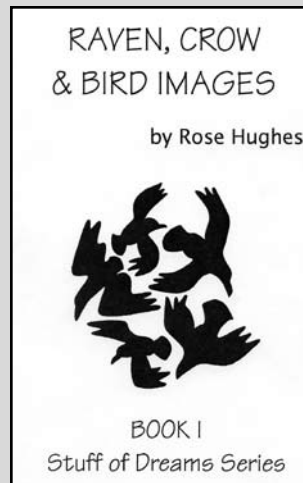
Last spring, fabric artist Rose B. Hughes sent a copy of her quilting pattern booklet "Raven, Crow & Bird Images," the first in her Stuff of Dreams booklet series.

Hughes wrote: "I have been an avid reader of the Corvi Chronicle for many years. It has always brought a great deal of joy to know that I am not alone in my love of ravens and the other Corvi family members.

"... I have been lucky to have my work shown at many venues including an episode of Simply Quilts, (#919), seen on HGTV and DIY Network called, "Rose Hughes, the Birds and Beads." One lucky raven even opened the show.

"In the past year I have completed a series of eight booklets. These cover various images and techniques that I use in my art quilts. Naturally, the first one completed was Raven and Bird images. I have included a copy here and hope that you enjoy some of these images and can share them with other corvid fans."

She invited us to view her work online at [www.Rosehughes.com](http://www.Rosehughes.com). We did and there we found a colorful array of quilts,



many with raven themes, alongside a quote Hughes had selected to feature:

"When a feather falls at your feet, it means you are to travel on wings of curiosity. Don't be afraid of strange lands or a language you don't understand. The feather means freedom. Why else do you think the bird gave it to you." from Pueblo Reflections by Nancy Wood.

We also found this note from Hughes: "During the

last several years I have allowed my interest in ravens to guide my work. This has been a freeing experience and opened the door to innumerable new personal insights and quilting opportunities. The quilts created during this period have been produced by progressively experimenting with various design elements and techniques. Like raven I have gone outside 'the rules' to create these personal statements. Some ideas have worked, others have not, but each piece in this series has brought me new knowledge and ideas to fuel my work into the future."

Ravenspeak Quilts mailing address is 1957 Temple Ave., Signal Hill, Calif. 90755.

## Art Credits

Page 1, Corvidae stamps by Mike Hess, Seattle, Wash., originally appeared in a 2003 issue. Page 2, watercolor by Gerda

daRif, Connecticut artist, has appeared in previous issues. Page 10, new linocut by Evon Zerbetz, Ketchikan, Alaska.

## Privacy act

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.



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## PUPPET MASTER

Linocut by Evon Zerbetz of Ketchikan, Alaska. To view more art by Zerbetz go to [evon@evonzerbetz.com](mailto:evon@evonzerbetz.com)

**CORVI CHRONICLE**  
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DON & PENNY  
ISSUE ψψ

