

Corvi Chronicle

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BUREAU OF AMPLIFICATION

Lesser known corvid facts in history

Question: In the most recent issue of the Chronicle your culinary columnist, Gorgeous Gorge, mentioned that “to eat” or “eating” crow is an Americanism associated with political humiliation. Am I correct in thinking the expression was coined during the administration of Andrew Jackson during the controversy over the U.S. bank?
– *W.M. Debuscher, Waco, Texas*

Answer: Miss Gorge, or GeeGee as she is affectionately called in this shop, is essentially a TV personality. Therefore we do not and others should not hold her to the highest standards of historical accuracy. This being said you are, WMD, quite mistaken as to the origins of “to eat” or “eating” crow. They are not American and only if the term is stretched tortuously are they political. In fact it was first employed on Oct. 15, 1793, by a second chef then employed at the palace of Versailles, southwest of Paris, France. It seems that this servant, a brave man whose name is no longer remembered, was a secret republican. He became enraged when he overheard Marie Antoinette, Queen of France, remark that starving Parisians who were begging for breach should “eat cake.” The chef therefore appropriated two

crows that were being prepared for a 20-bird pie and used them to create a spicy pate. The Queen was especially fond of this treat and on the day before her execution called for it.

The daring chef burst into her quarters shouting: “let her munch crow.” He was immediately overpowered and beaten to a pulp but nevertheless made a lasting linguistic and intellectual contribution.

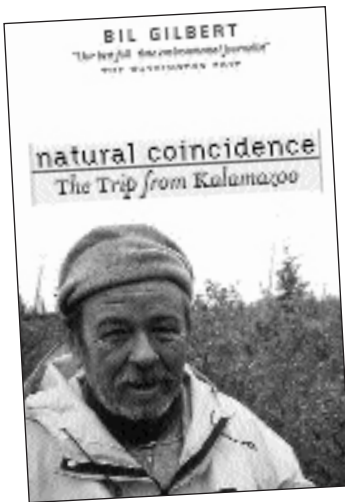
Question: My grandfather was a dirty and profane glutton who during his declining years – which were many – lived with my family on our farm in rural Indiana. I vividly recall that at the dinner table, after losing a string of course, this old domestic tyrant would often berate my mother and father for not providing him with a “crowete.” At the time I was too fearful to ask what a “crowete” might be. As I myself age, I am increasingly troubled by this memory and the word itself often haunts my mind and imagination.

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TWO FROM KALAMAZOO

ASCAR founder's essays: *Natural coincidence*

The University of Michigan Press has announced the July publication of *Natural Coincidence: The Trip from Kalamazoo*, a new book by Bil Gilbert, the founder of the American Society of Crows and Ravens and a frequent contributor to the Corvi Chronicle. The volume is a collection of previously published (in Audubon, Playboy, Smithsonian and Sports Illustrated magazines) and unpublished essays.



Gilbert, the winner of many journalistic and literary awards, is widely recognized as one of our finest prose stylists. Of his work the Smithsonian magazine has commented:

“Bil Gilbert has been writing about nature so well, so sensibly and so long that he’s become a kind of a natural resource to be cherished for his own sake, like the rivers, hawks, grizzlies and other wonders he evokes with low-key eloquence.”

The author has also been described (by the Washington Post) as “our best

full-time environmental journalist.” However Gilbert’s observations and comments have never been restricted to conventional environmental matters. In *Natural Coincidence* he writes as often about the behaviors and quirks of people as he does about those of other species. The subjects include the Great Depression, ring-tailed cats, rodeo riders, Mothman, Eskimo artists, snapping turtles and naturally, crows. In this book, Gilbert’s tenth, is “Hello the Crow,” one of the most moving accounts of the bonds that can form between people and corvids. Though often identified only by his Corvi number, Gilbert’s commentaries in the Corvi Chronicle range from the

Continued on page 2

BUREAU OF AMPLIFICATION *continued*

Early kitchen tool and Bombardment of Crowburg

- A Disturbed Hoosier

Answer: No doubt your family was of very modest circumstances and – as did many similar ones in the Midwest – served fruits, vegetables and condiments in the same cans or jars in which they had been preserved. A crowete was a wooden handled, long, slender, metallic utensil, sharply pointed and slightly curved at the end. It was used to extract pickles, beans, cherries and such from the bottoms of cans or jars. Associated with poverty and the uncouth, crowetes were usually discarded when the lot of a family improved. An American invention, crowetes in good condition will often sell for \$120 to \$200 at antique auctions.

Interestingly (as reported in the Corvi Chronicle, XVI No. 1) New Zealand ornithologists have discovered that crows on the South Pacific island of New Caledonia manufacture – from the stems of palm leaves – an instrument very similar to the crowete. The birds use these utensils to spear and hook grubs from tree cavities. Many species are known to use found objects as tools but only those crows and ourselves are to date, indisputably tool makers.

One of the darker happenings in American history, had the Bombardment occurred in modern times, it might well have led to the impeachment of a sitting President.

Question: I am an avid genealogical researcher and have found that my early ancestors settled in “Crowburg” New Jersey “prior to the Bombardment.” However, I have been unable to locate additional information about either Crowburg or a bombardment of any sort. Can you help? – *Nick Boggart, Decatur, Mich.*

Answer: Certainly. Crowburg – so called because of its proximity to a large winter roost of American crows – was a coastal community south of the present Atlantic City. It was founded, circa 1712, by immigrants from New York who found the lack of family values and fast lifestyle of Gotham to be abhorrent. The Bombardment occurred a century later and is one of the darker happenings of American history, one which had it occurred in modern times might well have led to the impeachment of a sitting President.

To elaborate: The first settlers of Crowburg were in the main hard working respectable folk. However among them was an individual now remembered only as Mother Leeds. Apparently she was a lusty woman of unpleasant dispositions, a quack herbalist and probably a part-time witch. By 1735 she had born 12 children, an excessive number she thought. She then publicly announced that, “If I ever have another child, may it be a devil.” This proved to be an ineffective approach to family planning as a child was born to her in 1836. It had the head of a ram, the body and wings of a huge bird, cloven

TWO FROM KALAMAZOO

Corvi authors explore destinations known and unknown

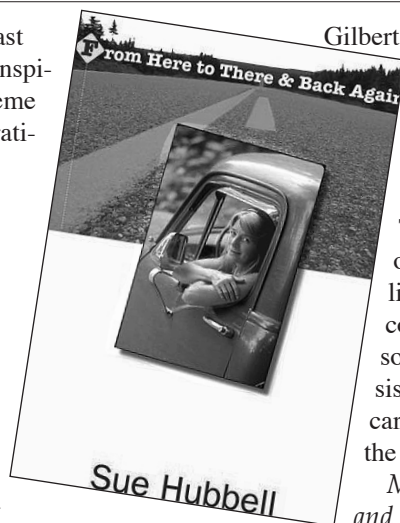
wry and comic to the thought provoking and passionate and deal with such topics as ecology, evolution, current politics and pop culture.

In *Natural Coincidence*, happenings occur and beings are met in such various locales as Manhattan and the Sonoran desert, the high Arctic and the island of Tasmania. Offering an explanation for the title of the book, Gilbert writes: “More than 50 years ago, without a clear notion of where I was going, I set off on a trip from Kalamazoo, Michigan [where he grew up]. I am still traveling toward an unknown destination. But along the way, much more for reasons of good luck than thoughtful planning, I have met many wonderful beings and happenings. The essays appearing in *Natural Coincidence* represent an attempt to describe some of these wonders. I like

to thank, or at least pretend that the inspiration for and theme of this book is gratitude.”

Natural Coincidence is now available in bookstores or may be obtained through them. It can be ordered directly through Amazon.com and also from the University of Michigan Press: telephone: 1-800-621-2736 or www.press.umich.edu.

In August the University of Michigan will also publish *From Here to There & Back Again*, by Sue Hubbell,



Gilberts’ sister. A member of ASCAR and also a highly regarded essayist, Hubbell is the author of seven previous books and has written for the New Yorker, New York Times, Smithsonian and many other periodicals. Her essays like those of her brother are concerned with both natural and social history. Both brother and sister commenced their writing careers as teenage reporters for the Kalamazoo Gazette.

More books by corvi authors and illustrators are on page 8.

BUREAU OF AMPLIFICATION *continued**“Crow bar” originally referred to “Raven bar”*

hoofs and a phosphorescent complexion. Immediately the infant flew up the Leed’s chimney and as the Jersey Devil, as it shortly came to be known, has inhabited the region ever since.

As the JD matured it became increasingly abusive of people and their property. On one occasion it attacked police officers in the city of Camden. They fired on the creature but were unable to bring it down. During a rural raid the JD devastated a farm, eating at “one sitting, two large dogs, three geese, four cats and 31 ducks.”

In 1812, though much occupied by the war of that year, President James Madison determined that punitive action must be taken against this alien terrorist in New Jersey. He therefore ordered Captain Stephen Decatur to set sail for the Jersey shore in the “United States” then the nation’s most powerful warship. Arriving off Crowburg, Decatur began bombarding and eventually leveled the community. On hearing of the incident, President Madison remarked that in a war against a Devil, collateral damage was to be expected. While the destruction of Crowburg and loss of life there was unfortunate the campaign should be regarded as a good work since it had freed Jerseyites from the clutches of the Spawn of Satan. This victorious claim proved to be false. During the engagement, Decatur reported that his gunners had scored a direct hit on the Jersey Devil with a six-pound cannonball. But if so the creature was a quick healer. Despite a standing reward of \$10,000 for its capture, the creature continues to this day to be seen in the Garden State.

Some members of the Leeds family survived the Bombardment of Crowburg, which, understandably was never rebuilt. They moved to the state of Michigan and settled in several small towns. Some of the enterprising Leeds prospered as food distributors, marketing the Old Scratch brand of deviled hams, eggs and cakes.



This unappealing raven aggravated tavern patrons and worse, offended the barmaid by making lewd wing and feet gestures toward her.

Question: I fail to see a resemblance between a crow or any part of a crow and a crowbar. Why is the tool so named? — *Annie Auber, Ulalume, Calif.*

AnsWER: Basically because many people, especially those residing in urban areas of the northeast, cannot tell a crow from a raven or, for that matter, a hawk from a handsaw. The following event is responsible for this particular misnomer. In 1846 Edgar Allen Poe, already a notable poet and drunk, was living in New York City and frequenting a low joint, the Gold Bug, on the upper west side. He often visited this tavern with a raven perched on his shoulder. The bird was irascible, defecated where and whenever it chose and in raucous voice incessantly croaked “Nevermore,” and nothing else. This unappealing raven aggravated many of the Gold Bug’s patrons. Worse it overtly offended Katie, the barmaid, by making lewd wing and feet gestures toward her. Eventually the proprietor of the Gold bug asked Poe to leave his raven behind when he came to the tavern. Even if he heard and understood it, Poe paid no attention to the request. Because he was a notable poet and drunk, the proprietor decided against tossing Poe out on the street.

One dank and drear afternoon in the lonesome October, Katie happened to look out the streaked front window and saw the poet and his raven approaching. The quick thinking lass picked up a pry bar, which was kept handy for controlling customers, and placed it between the two handles of the front door thus barring entrance to Poe and his awful bird. Inside, patrons laughed heartily as those two vainly sought entrance.

The story about how Katie had barred the door against the drunken poet and his shitting crow was told and retold in New York watering holes and from there spread across the Hudson to other parts. In the retelling the tool the clever girl had used became simply a crow bar rather than it properly should have been a raven bar.

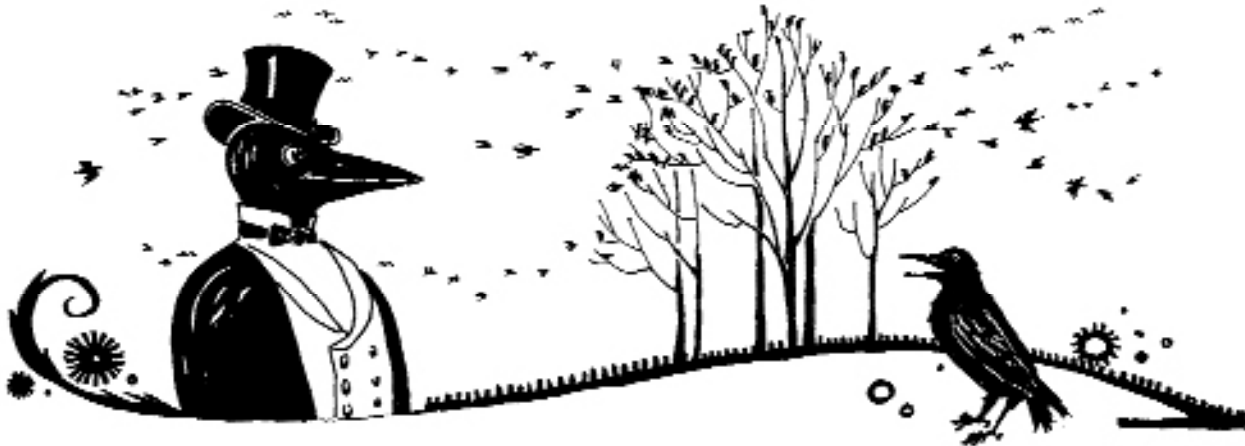
Privacy act

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 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.



THE TALK OF THE ROOST

MAB: ABOUT A CROW

In a column for the Feb. 12, 2004, Washington Post Book World, author Louise Erdrich focused on her experience with a companion crow – one of many animals to share her household and distract her work. With the exception of a rescued cedar waxwing and a particularly big-hearted dog, Erdrich wrote that she only truly missed the crow, named Mab.

“My sister found her, half-fledged, after a storm, and brought her to our house because she knew I’d always wanted a crow. I didn’t think I could save this one -- some feathers were broken, her beak was horribly infected, head swollen, eye battered. But we ground up penicillin, mixed it with hamburger, stuffed bits down her throat every hour and effected a slow cure. ...

“...Eventually Mab was uncontainable indoors, so I took the screen out of my third-floor window and let her perch in the tree that grows so close I can almost touch it. She lived outside and inside. Pallas [daughter] scattered bread in the yard hoping to make friends for Mab, then she sat for hours watching Mab approach one crow and another. They took the bread and shrieked at Mab and drove her off. Pallas said it was very much like life in junior high.

“I found it very hard to write during the time that Mab was leaving us. I kept wondering where she was. I had never had a wild animal confide in me the way Mab did, or fall in love with me. Instead of going up to work in the morning, I’d

sit in the overgrown garden and wait for her to fly down from wherever she’d slept. She would dance toward me with a twig in her beak, taking small bobbing steps and crooning original sounds I didn’t know a crow could make. I felt like she was making up love-poems on the spot. ...

“In the early fall, she finally fell in with some other crows. They came for her, calling from the trees around our house. ...”

Erdrich wrote that she last saw Mab one day when her office window was open. Erdrich’s father was visiting and the two were talking when Mab landed on the sill. Despite warnings from crow companions in the nearby tree, Mab alighted on Erdrich’s shoulder, accepted some soft cat food that was handy and cawed with Erdrich and her father before flying away with the other crows.

“Sometimes a crow comes very near the house, and I imagine it is Mab. Crows flap down to sit in the trees around our yard, calling until we bring out something for them to eat, and I think that Mab is among them. The things they say, their requests and talk, their arguments and rejoicing, seem very understandable. When they mob together in the pines down the street, Pallas goes and sits beneath the trees. I think she feels included in their conversations. Because of Mab, we’re all like this now, aware that alongside our life in the city these familiar creatures have their own laws, neighborhoods, alliances, crimes and cel-

ebrations. ...”

Erdrich writes novels as well as poetry and children’s books. Her novel *Love Medicine* won the National Book Critics Circle Award. She lives in Minnesota with her daughters and is the owner of Birchbark Books, a small independent bookstore.

DECEITFUL STUFF

As recently reported in *Animal Cognition*: Dr. Thomas Bugmyar has, at the University of Austria, been investigating the mindset of two ravens, Hugin and Munin. (The derivation of the names will be recognized by most Chronicle readers.) The initial, overt test was to see if the birds could decipher a color code that indicated which of a series of closed tin containers contained cheese, a favored food. Hugin proved to be the more adept of the two. But Munin was the dominant bird and a bully. When Hugin had correctly identified and opened the cheese-containing can, Munin would drive him away from the prize and eat it himself. After a time Hugin discovered an unused but color-coded set of containers in the lab. He then would enthusiastically open one of the empty containers and pretend to be eating from it. On seeing this Munin drove away the less aggressive bird and began to search for the nonexistent food cache. While he was so occupied Hugin returned to a marked can containing cheese and enjoyed it while the dominant Munin

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TALK *continued*

was distracted. All of which indicated to Bugmyar that at least some ravens are, like many of us, capable of intentional deceit.

BUREAU TO BARD: NEVERMORE

Richard Leiby's The Reliable Source column in the April 8, 2004, The Washington Post reported that the federal Homeland Security Advanced Research Projects Agency had recruited Edgar Allan Poe's raven to represent its mission.

Leiby spied a logo with a wings-up raven carrying a ribbon emblazoned with the word "nevermore" as it flew in front of an unfurled U.S. flag on a HSARPA information sheet circulating on Capitol Hill that week. The agency's full title encircled the raven-in-flight.

HSARPA is the agency within Homeland Security responsible for developing secretive high-tech counterterrorism gizmos, Leiby wrote. And although Leiby quothed Homeland Security officials saying it was not a sanctioned logo, he reported the information sheet said:

"The raven has an honored place in worldwide mythological traits and his mythological traits signify HSARPA's role and way of doing business. In Norse mythology, each day Odin would send his ravens, Huginn and Muninn, around the world.... They returned at nightfall, perched on his shoulders, and related the news of the world. Ravens are prominent in Celtic, Irish, and Welsh mythology in which they invariably have the gift of prophesy or foresight. Ravens also appear in the myths of the dwarves who live on the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro....

"In many shamanic cultures of North America, Raven is the Creator, the provider of light and fire, and a trickster, who can change shapes to obtain his ends."

The fact sheet concluded: "The ribbon carried by our Raven symbolizes Edgar Allan Poe's dark poetry, a metaphor to the aftermath of 9/11, and also the com-

mitment that terrorist attacks on the USA shall occur nevermore!"

Leiby responded: "Shamans? Dwarves? Tricksters? Hey, this is creeping us out, like that all-seeing eyeball adopted by the Pentagon's Office of Total Information Awareness!"

As he checked with Homeland Security officials for a quote about the logo, Leiby was informed that it wasn't an official logo.

Furthermore the Department of Homeland Security is the only logo that exists for all offices within the agency and it features an eagle.

"Then a more senior official, Susan Neely, called" Leiby wrote, "to say the [raven] logo was dead as the bard of Baltimore. 'It will not be used.'"



CHEWING THE FAT

In response to essays on the fate of fat that appeared in the winter special Bon Appetit edition of the Chronicle, Corvi #009 of Tuckahoe, N.Y., wrote the following note.

I liked Ivor Dupoys's story on obesity. I haven't had the chance to chew the fat with old Ivor for a long time. Did you ever meet his Australian cousin, Afferback Lauder? Affey wrote the book *How to Talk Strine* in which Emma Chizzit appears (she was a shopping expert, specializing in buying Rice Supplies in Sydney for her husband, who had a tough beard). I loaned my copy to Andre who died without giving it back. I entertained the notion of dropping in to visit his widow, wondering if I could idly wander by his bookcases as I chatted with her and maybe spot it and swipe it back. No such luck. Wonderful book, though. Another Aussie book is called *The Superior Person's Book of Words*, by Peter Bowler. The introduction alone is worth the price of admission, especially the last paragraph: "Finally, a special message for many lexicographers or philologists into whose hands this book falls: the author may or may not have incorporated into the text, as a stimulus and a challenge to your perspicacity, one or more deliberate errors."

Here are a few of his examples:

Turdiform: Like a thrush in shape, the thrush being a bird of the family

Turdidae.

Aspirator: Instrument for drawing pus from abscesses. Its natural usage is in the contemplative remark, made at the quiet fireside after the children have gone to bed. "You know, dear, I've been thinking it would be a nice gesture if we gave your uncle an aspirator for Christmas."

Expostulate: To reason earnestly. One of a group of words which can be used to some effect, in the right circumstances, as faintly suggestive of acts too indelicate to be referred to explicitly by the author of this book. 'There they were, expostulating under a tree,' etc. Useful for disconcerting persons delivering religious pamphlets at your door."

RAVEN: 'I'LL GET THE LIGHTS'

Seattle Times science reporter Eric Sorensen wrote of the trials and tribulations of raven research in the wild in the Jan. 6 issue. The full story of his adventures with University of Washington wildlife ecologist John Marzluff trying to net and band ravens is online. The Seattle Times Web site includes audio files of the raven's call and vocalizations. See http://seattletimes.nwsources.com/html/local-news/134610109_raven06m.html.

Sorensen describes the raven's ability to think and outwit a couple of humans with considerable book learning and banding experience. He quoted Nuuchah-Nulth artist George David's philosophy of raven: "A raven has a real strong presence, a real strong power. When you see him he wants to be seen."

Sorensen wrote, "While most animals are driven largely by the hard-wired dynamics of instinct, ravens and other birds in the corvid family think.

"J.R. Inghram, who feeds and watches up to 2,000 ravens near his Grant County home, once had a pet raven that would turn on the carpet cleaner after messing the floor.

"After watching us, this guy would turn lights on in rooms and turn them off when he left," said Inghram.

"The raven at the Woodland Park Zoo solves puzzles to get food. When new handlers visit her aviary, she will untie their shoelaces and try to swipe food from the pouches they keep on their

Continued on page 7

ROOST NOTES

Stealing food at family gatherings

NORTHWESTERN

CROW BEHAVIOR

From the University of Washington

News Bureau

Animal behaviorists have something new to crow about. Researchers at the University of Washington have found a species of crow that distinctly alters its behavior when attempting to steal food from another crow, depending on whether or not the other bird is a relative.

The Northwestern crow (*Corvus caurinus*) uses a passive strategy when it attempts to take food from kin but becomes aggressive when it tries to steal a morsel from a non-related crow. This is believed to be the first time that such a behavior pattern has been observed in any bird species.

The findings were published in the journal *Bird Behavior* by Renee Robinette Ha and James Ha, psychologists at UW. In a companion paper to be published in the journal *Animal Behavior*, the Has, a husband-wife team, quantified scrounging or thievery attempts among Northwest crows. When birds found valuable items such as small fish or clams, other birds tried to steal the food 46 percent of the time and 41 percent of those attempts were successful.

"This research shows these birds discriminate kin from non-kin," said Renee Ha. "They can tell who they are related to and treat birds differently. We know it is more complex and sophisticated than being based on just the birds they know. Crows and other corvids (ravens, jays and magpies) are highly complex cognitively and socially, and are very adaptive."

Earlier work by the Has showed that thievery is common among these birds, which are constantly looking for an opportunity to filch a snack from another crow.

To understand crow behavior, the researchers captured and banded 55 birds that foraged in a suburban Snohomish County park along Puget Sound north of Seattle. They also drew a small blood sample from each bird. The bands enabled the researchers to identify individual crows. DNA analysis of the blood allowed the Has to determine which of the banded birds were related.

The researchers observed the crows for 223 hours over the course of two-and-a-half years, looking for instances of thievery involving two banded birds. The crows' behavior was remarkably different, depending on the target of a theft.

When the birds are related a crow will use a passive strategy



Lightning Strikes Again, pastel by Judith Gebhard Smith, Nightwing Studio, Olympia, Wash. Used with artist's permission. See nightwingstudio.com

and "walk up to or kind of sidle next to the bird with the food. Often the second bird will give up the food to the scrounger," said Renee Ha. "With aggressive scrounging, there is usually a flying approach by the thief who nearly lands on the other bird. This can be followed by vocalization, physical contact and attempts to take the food. Usually it also involves chasing and avoidance by the bird with the food."

She added that there does not appear to be any other pattern associated with scrounging. The sex or age of the birds do not seem to be factors and the birds will steal from relatives as well

as non-relatives.

The researchers noted that the majority of the crows they observed engaged in hunting for food as well as thievery. A few crows only hunted and none exclusively relied on stealing.

"Crows can not steal for a living because there are not enough opportunities to steal enough big food items. Scrounging fills a gap and crows will do it if the bird next to them has high value food that takes time to swallow," Renee Ha said.

James Ha added that the Northwest crows have complex social groups. "They tend to associate in stable groups that contain some of the same birds all of the time. But these groups are not kinship groups and the members are not all necessarily related to each other. They will try to steal food from familiar birds, kin or strangers," he said.

"This behavior seems to be specific to Northwest crows which are shoreline feeders of large prey," said Renee Ha. "Most people, regardless of where they live, are familiar with the more common American crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*), which feeds on worms and grain. That kind of food does not offer targets for thievery."

BLOOD SAMPLES FROM CROW SHOOT

The New York Times reported this spring that Dr. Kevin J. McGowan at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in Ithaca and Dr. Anne B. Clark, professor of biology at Binghamton University, took blood samples from 130 crows killed in the Auburn Crow shoot reported in the Summer 2003 Chronicle. McGowan and Clark took the blood samples to determine if crows were developing resistance to the West Nile virus but the results were not

BOOK SHELF

More summer reading from corvi

Recent books written or illustrated by Corvi include:

Crows in our Hands

Crows in Our Hands, by John Paul Barrett, Gaff Press, Astoria, Ore. See GAFFPRESS.com

Paul and Tricia Barrett have raised a dozen or so fledgling crows. The book describes problems and pleasures they have had.

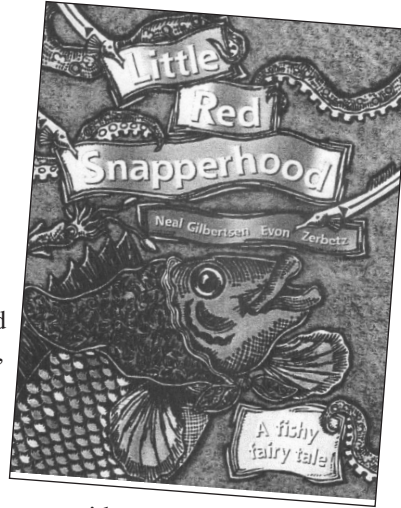
Aleutian Sparrow and Little Red Snapperhood

Chronicle readers may remember Evon Zerbitz, the Ketchikan, Alaska, artist whose work has appeared frequently in the Chronicle. In addition to her linocuts and cards, Zerbitz has illus-

trated five books, the latest being *Aleutian Sparrow* by Karen Hesse and *Little Red Snapperhood* by Neal Gilbertson. Both were published in 2003.

Simon and Schuster published *Aleutian Sparrow*, a young adult novel that takes place in Alaska during World War II. Written in free-verse, the story tells of the evacuation of the Aleut people to Southeast Alaska.

Westwinds Press published *Little Red Snapperhood*, a fishy fairy tale romp full of fishy puns. With a twist on the classic fairy tale, *Little Red Snapperhood* begins "Once upon a maritime..." Red snapper dons her favorite



squid tasseled hat and sets out to grandmother's home with a fresh-baked octopi. Unbeknownst to her, the wolf eel has scared grandma out of her cozy oyster bed and

is waiting for Red snapper. The fish tale remains true to the traditional tale until the end, when the story takes a friendly turn.

In 2005, look for a picture book Zerbitz is creating and illustrating with author Susan Ewing. Zerbitz has been collecting believe-it-or-not raven anecdotes to include in her book. See evonzerbetz.com/

Crow

Crow by Boria Sax, Reaktion Books, Ltd., London, United Kingdom. See www.reaktionbooks.co.uk

A compilation of well-known crow/raven myths from around the world; with timeline and bibliography.

ROOST NOTES *continued*

Testing resistance to West Nile

available at the time the story appeared.

The Chronicle did not locate an update on the results of the blood samples.

Clark estimated that 40 percent of the crow population of Ithaca had been lost since the appearance of West Nile in 2000. She noted that the Audubon Society's Christmas Bird County and annual breeding surveys had not indicated a decline in the numbers of crows, but she and McGowan cautioned that it is difficult to count birds.

One reason for studying birds killed in the Crow shoot, McGowan told NY Times reporter James Gorman, is that "it's hard to get your hands on crows, alive or dead. It's really hard to get them alive."

Although there has been no evidence that crow numbers are declining, McGowan cautioned against complacency. If crows are not developing some resistance to West Nile, and it keeps killing them every year, sooner or later the problems will appear, he told the reporter.

Gorman reported that more than 1,000 crows were killed in the Auburn shoot. The town, he wrote, is known for the introduction of the electric chair.

TALK *continued*

waists.

"She'll still do it with all of us sometimes, but she knows with somebody new that she can really do it to them well," said Becky Barker, raptor keeper. "They are the trickster."

"...[Ravens] have one of the largest brains of any bird for its size. ...

"Most of what they figure out is how to get food without getting killed in the process," said Marzluff. "That's their fundamental challenge."

"A large brain also lets the raven deal with the office politics of its social hier-

archy, remembering which birds it needs to avoid and which it can dominate, who it must fight, who it can work with..

"A lot of those kinds of social constructs that help animals function more efficiently in a group require memory and individual recognition," said Marzluff. "And to do that you start selecting for a big brain, instead of super-keen eyesight to see things three miles away. And also the kind of food they're going after, being generalists and animals that rely on booms and busts of food, you have to remember where things are and you have to be able to adapt to new kinds of foods in new situations. That all favors memory and learning and insight."

"To this Marzluff adds another thought. The raven has been solving complex problems and living in complex societies for several million years, longer than the earliest human species.

"Here we were, relatively solitary ape," Marzluff said. "Ravens will give apes a battle in terms of memory abilities now. It's interesting to think they were smarter than us and now maybe it's the other way around." — *Corvi* #123 *Seattle, Wash.*

Corvus Indeed!

Been a corvid 45, 46 years – since age 9 or 10 – had an interesting encounter with a crow/raven back then. — Now I'm official. I am *Corvi 44*. – *Napa, Calif.*

TODDLERS CAWING

Thank you for 14 great years of articles and notes. My sons, now 3-and-a-half and two-and-a-half, both started their birding lists with the crow and practice their “caw caw” call regularly. We've since added the usual assortment of backyard birds, but the crows were their first. – *Corvi 46, 46.25, 46.55, Portland, Maine*

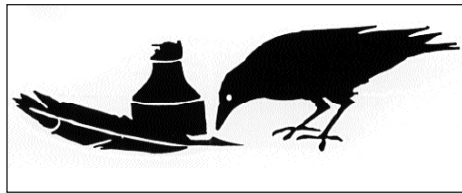
CROW IN THE FAMILY

Finally a response to my past contribution to the Journal of the American Society of Crows and Ravens.

As a mystery editor you are to be complimented for a brilliant and educational digest on stories and events of crows and ravens.

I am a recipient of the pleasure of having a tree fallen crow as a family member for almost three years. I rediscovered the intelligence of the American crow who captured the hearts, minds, affection and celebrity status of a small rural village, Falls, northeastern Pennsylvania along the beautiful Susquehanna River.

His roguish charm as a jewelry thief, milkman's helper, school visitor playmate, classroom detractor, softball fan, music lover, bar room fly and beer lover, who was a daily playmate of four youngsters on the outdoor teeter totter, sliding board and swings. He “walked” his playmates to our one-room school and returned to join them when school was out for the day. He played with them as



LETTERS

sport dominated each event. Our girls carried each exciting day to our dinner table with the crow's antics and intelligence in utilizing his ability. – *Corvi 51, Mashpee, Mass. and Bay Harbor Islands, Florida*

SITKA SPRING

Greetings:

Many thanks for continuing to send copies of *Corvi Chronicle* to me and my wife. We live in a nursing home and after enjoying the paper ourselves, we place it in the reading room where other residents can find it.

There have been many comments on it, as we have both ravens and crows in this area and they are very visible on the grounds of the Home.

As the days lengthen we are also seeing more and more American Bald Eagles, our national bird. After wintering on the Chilkat River, a couple of hundred miles north of here. They come here in the spring when the herring come into shallow water to spawn. The herring, but not the eagles, are welcomed by the people of the town. The eagles are a bird of prey and more than one family has lost a cat or a small dog to them.

Our daughter, who was born and grew up in Sitka, particularly detests the eagles. She lives on the shore of a salt-

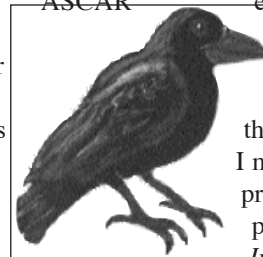
feeds the white salt water ducks that congregate during the winter. After the eagles arrive the ducks are easy victims.

Again, many thanks.

I have a particular interest in Kansas. My father was born in a soddy in Lincoln County in 1875 and graduated at Manhattan in 1903. He then came to Sitka as a horticulturalist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which had an agricultural experiment station here. – *Corvi 98 and 99, Sitka, Alaska*

JOINING THE ROOST

Dear *Corvi Chronicle* staff: Hi! I've been reading the ASCAR website online. I've always liked watching birds and crows are my favorite species. It's great that an organization like ASCAR



exists. I'd like to become a member. At the bottom of this letter is the drawing of a crow I made with the paint program on my computer. – *Corvi 921, Irvine, Calif.*

NUMBER OF CORVI

Salutations Editor

Enclosed is a modest amount for the *Corvi Chronicle*. It is always a pleasure to read about the corvids in other parts of the world, and to see the current *Corvi* definitions of words and phrases.

Concerning the controversy over the *Corvi 333* duplication, each number when coupled with the location is unique. If two 333s live in the same city, then it becomes more of a problem.

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 #06*
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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
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BOX 1423
LAWRENCE KS 66044-8423

LETTERS *continued*

One crow was seen back on Catalina in 1968, but nothing more was documented until another was spotted by reliable sources in March 1996. The numbers have slowly increased: In 2001 I observed two in Avalon; by the next summer, 6 were observed in around the golf course at the back of town; and a couple of weeks ago I saw about 20 heading back to the roost. The ravens seem to accept them in Avalon and continue to rule the other 96 percent of the island, most of that is undeveloped. – *Corvi 333, Avalon, Calif.*

THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT

To whom it may concern:

I would like to become an official member of ASCAR. ... I would like to use the number 1734 and be known as an Ambassador of Entertainment 'smiles' when referring to myself either in writing

or talking with other corvis.

I have recently been blessed with several *Corvus Corax* sightings here in the panhandle area of Florida and if I can manage to get a decent digital snapshot of the rowdy and boisterous crow I have seen lately I will send it along to the Corvi Chronicle for your pleasure.

Current personal research has led to the reading of several books by Bernd Heinrich on ravens and I have perused the suggested reading from the ASCAR site and now have several more books added to my 'to read' list, thanks much! – *Corvi 1734, aka the Ambassador of Entertainment, Panama City, Fla.*

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

To whom it may concern:

I work as an occupational therapist at a residential facility for the disabled. One of my clients is working on using her arm in a functional way. We go out to the gardens and I give her peanuts to throw to the crows. The crows see us coming and are always ready to do their

part in our "animal assisted therapy." My client laughs at the crows' antics and the crows seem to enjoy the sessions too. I'm glad they're willing to work as therapy assistants for peanuts. – *Jeanne Shepard, Corvi 1956, Seattle, Wash.*

STEALING RAISINS

After congregating in a nearby oak tree, apparently to announce the appearance of spring and warmer weather, our suburban crows are now uncharacteristically quiet. But I know they are still around because I catch them stealing the raisins that I place on the sidewalk for the mockingbirds. But I don't mind since it is a lean time of the year for our black friends.

Please find enclosed a bit of support for the Chronicle. I enjoy reading it and always look forward to the next issue.

– *Corvi #16, Hurst, Texas*

Headliner

CAWS FOR DISMISSAL!

This just in from The National Enquirer: School bus driver loses job because dozens of crows follow her everywhere she goes! CAWS FOR DISMISSAL! Okay, it was in the Dec. 30, 2003, issue, six months ago.

The story referred to the Bellevue, Wash., school bus driver who had been disciplined for feeding crows as a "crow magnet" with a "cloud of black crows" hanging over her head. The driver, a 61-year-old grandmother, had been feeding crows in the school bus parking lot for 12 years. When other employees complained that the crows were causing damage to their personal vehicles and to the school buses, she was placed on a day's leave and ordered to park outside the school district property.

"I was totally stunned when I was disciplined," the driver told the reporter. "I've complied with the instructions and I'm back at work again, but my job is still in jeopardy. I was told I am the subject of an investigation.

"Why, I don't know. I no longer park at my old spot. I don't feed the crows anymore, although quite a few still hang around me. I can't help that. ... What I do know, is if they decide to fire me, I'll sue the pants off them!"

A labor organizer told the Enquirer, "This has got to be the most ridiculous disciplinary action I've come across in my years of handling labor disputes!"

The bus driver said she began feeding crows one cold winter morning about 12 years ago when she noticed a flock perched on a fence near the school bus parking lot.

"I ... bought some seeds and nuts and fed them. Boy, did that perk them up. I fed them regularly that winter, but I intended to stop when the weather warmed up."

The crows thought otherwise and followed the bus driver when she arrived,

School driver loses job because dozens of crows follow her everywhere she goes! CAWS FOR DISMISSAL!

PHYLIS ALVERDES doesn't think she's for the birds — because she's besieged by dozens of crows. A black cloud constantly hangs over the 61-year-old grandmother — a cloud of black crows that is fed the birds have ruffled the feathers of officials at the Bellevue, Wash., school district, who say the flock has damaged the paint and caused vehicles in the district's parking lot.

Phyllis first became a "crow magnet" about 12 years ago after she took pity on a bunch of crows perched on a fence next to the school bus parking lot on a cold, frosty morning.

"I bought some seeds and nuts and fed them. Boy, did that perk them up," she told The ENQUIRER. "Boy, did they perk them up. I fed them regularly that winter, but I intended to stop when the weather warmed up."

But school district officials say she has been disciplining her crows — and their offspring — over the years — by feeding them. However, the crows — following her — did for a handout. "I take kindly to her present entourage of crows," she said. "Four years ago, they had no problem with myself another parking spot outside school district property."

"I've complied with the instructions and I'm back at work again, but my job is still in jeopardy. I was told I am the subject of an ongoing investigation."

"Why, I don't know. I no longer park at my old spot."

whole business. What I do know is if they decide to fire me, I'll sue the pants off them!"

School district spokesman Ann Oerter said she is not aware of any ongoing investigation.

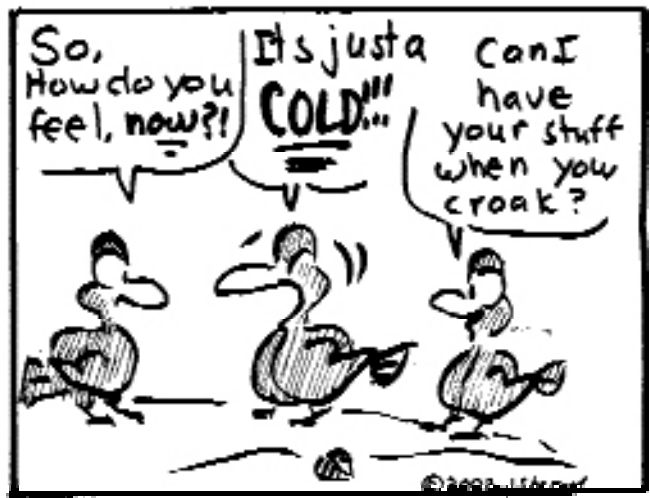
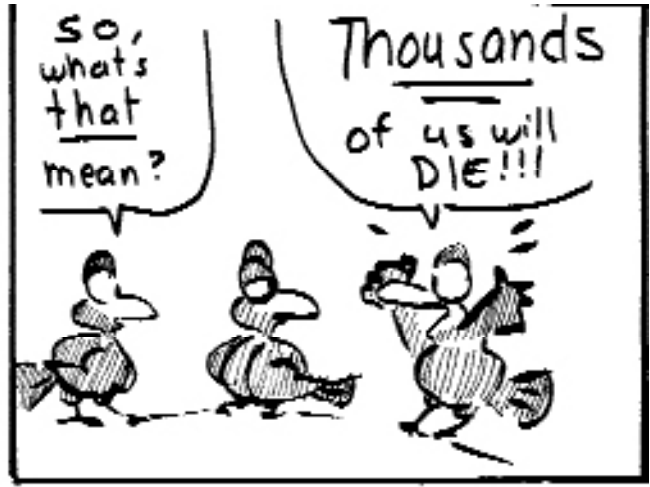
But Brandon Tiggo, local organizer for the Service Employees International Union — which represents bus drivers — told The ENQUIRER: "This issue has not been resolved satisfactorily. Ms. Alverdes was issued a stern letter of warning about a matter that was outside her control."

"She had not been feeding birds on school district property for four years and there is no evidence to support the allegations — that the crows were damaging vehicles parked on district property."

"This has got to be the most ridiculous disciplinary action I've come across in my years of handling labor disputes!"

clearly expecting a snack. "The trouble was that the crows — about 30 or 40 birds in a group — kept flying beside me when I walked," the driver said.

Four years ago school district officials ordered her not to feed the crows on school property. – *Corvi #123, Alexandria, Va.*



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SUMMER
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