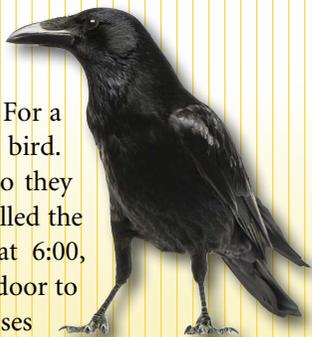




AN UNLIKELY FRIENDSHIP

In 1999, a crow appeared in the yard of Ann and Wally Collito in North Attleboro, Massachusetts. The couple watched in amazement as it befriended a stray black-and-white kitten. (Cats and crows are usually enemies!) The crow, acting like the kitten's mother, fed it bugs and worms. For a while, Ann said, the kitten trusted only the bird. Eventually, the kitten trusted the couple, so they adopted her and named her Cassie. They called the crow Moses. Every morning at 6:00,

Moses pecked on their screen door to summon Cassie. Cassie and Moses played together for 5 years before Moses disappeared.



LOVE BY THE BEAKFUL

As a preschooler, Gabi Mann of Seattle, Washington, sometimes dropped morsels of food in her yard by accident. A few crows noticed, swooped down, and devoured the treats. Soon, the crows began watching for Gabi. When she and her brother headed to the school bus stop, they scattered tidbits from their lunch bags. The crows gobbled those scraps, too, and returned to the bus stop in the afternoon, hoping for more. By 2013, Gabi and her mother were putting out fresh water, peanuts, and dry dog food for the crows each morning. That's when Gabi started getting gifts from the crows in return: small, shiny things that the birds could carry in their beaks, such as pieces of sea glass, buttons, paper clips, beads, and earrings. By 2015, when Gabi turned 8, she had a collection of trinkets, each labeled with a story about where and when the crows had left it. Her most prized gift is a small, pearl-color heart, which she says shows how much the crows love her.



Good, Bad, and Lucky Crows

- **Crows are helpful:** They eat garbage, dead animals, and insects that damage crops.
- **Crows can harm crops.** Since ancient times, farmers have been using "scarecrows" (get it?) to frighten birds away from their plants.
- **In some cultures, including Native American, crows are seen as bringing good luck.** In some myths, fables, and legends, crows are presented as tricksters, liars, and thieves.



GET TO KNOW THE CROW

Found in many parts of the world, crows are large black birds with a reputation for being loud and clever. Scientifically speaking, they belong to the genus *Corvus*, which includes crows, ravens, and rooks. They are also part of the Corvidae family, along with jays, magpies, and nutcrackers—some of the smartest of all birds. A common type, the American crow, is found over much of the United States year-round and in many parts of Canada during the summer.

You might recognize a crow's “caw, caw” call. Crows are chatty birds, with more than 20 calls, and “conversations” that can be several minutes long.



Crows eat almost anything, from earthworms and baby birds to roadkill and garbage. They do not usually bother with bird feeders. Look for crows in open areas near woods, parks, dumps, campgrounds, athletic fields, and parking lots. To attract them, put out unsalted peanuts, dry pet food, and even french fries on the ground in areas with both trees and open space. If you regularly feed them, you might find them waiting for you another day. They may even follow you!

CROWS LOVE A CROWD (OF OTHER CROWS!)



These social birds often sleep together in large groups, called roosts, especially in fall and winter. Roosts may contain fewer than a hundred birds or many, many more. A famous roost in Fort Cobb, Oklahoma, was estimated to include more than 2 million crows!

Watch out: Crows have been known to dive-bomb people if they get too close to nests containing their young babies, or fledglings.

Scientists have several theories about why crows enjoy big slumber parties. The birds may be trying to get to the safest, most comfortable spot, and they probably feel more protected from enemies when in large groups. They could also be spying to see where other crows fly to find food.

Crows like urban areas because they are often warmer, have fewer owl enemies, and provide lights to help them watch for enemies.

But large roosts in cities can turn into a noisy mess for people, leaving parks and sidewalks covered with bird droppings.



Light and sound can scare the birds without hurting them. After about 20,000 crows started hanging out in Albany, New York, a group from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services used flares, bullhorns, and nonharmful lasers to chase them away. Similar methods have been used in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Connecticut.

CROWS KNOW

Crows can hold grudges. Researchers in Seattle, Washington, did scans of crows' brains and determined that their brains "light up" when they see the threatening face of someone they have seen before.

In a separate study, birds were captured by researchers who wore one type of "threatening" mask, and the birds were then fed by researchers wearing a different type of "caring" mask. The crows could tell the difference.



Talking Crow

"A murder of crows" is a flock of crows.

"As the crow flies" refers to distance measured in a straight line.

"Crow's-feet" are wrinkles at the corners of a person's eyes.

"To be up with the crows" means to be awake early in the morning.

"To crow" about something means to brag or boast.

"To eat crow" means to admit that you are wrong.

BIRD BRAINS

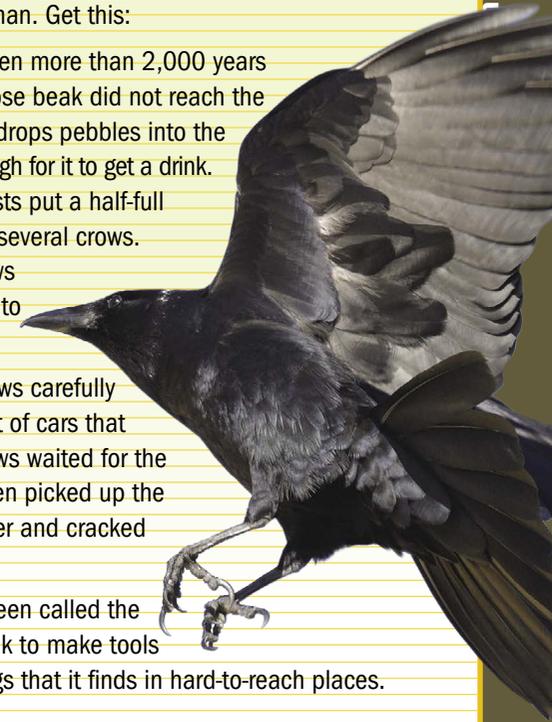
A crow's brain is about the size of a human thumb, and crows are about as smart as a typical 7-year-old human. Get this:

- Aesop's fables, a collection written more than 2,000 years ago, include the story of a crow whose beak did not reach the water in a half-full pitcher. The bird drops pebbles into the pitcher until the water level rises enough for it to get a drink.

In an experiment, modern scientists put a half-full pitcher of water in the presence of several crows. Like the one in the fable, these crows wisely dropped rocks into the water to raise the water level.

- In Japan, observers watched crows carefully place walnuts on crosswalks in front of cars that had stopped for a red light. The crows waited for the stoplight to change to green and then picked up the nut meats after the cars had run over and cracked open the nuts.

- The New Caledonian crow has been called the smartest of all crows. It uses its beak to make tools out of twigs and leaves to catch bugs that it finds in hard-to-reach places.



Getting Antsy

Sometimes crows and other birds sit on anthills and let ants crawl all over their bodies. Some birds chomp on the ants and rub themselves in their remains. Scientists call this "anting" and are not sure why it occurs. They suggest that ants produce formic acid that may act as an insect repellent or an oily liquid that may help to soothe the birds' skin as they lose their feathers.