

# UNUSUAL FEEDING HABIT OF THE COMMON CROW

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Houston has documented the increasing prevalence of the Common Crow nesting in urban settings such as Saskatoon.<sup>4 5</sup> This propensity of crows to live on residential streets also extends to small towns — Rosthern, 61 km northeast of Saskatoon, being an example. Thus I have had more opportunity to observe (and listen to) these interesting birds.<sup>3</sup>

One late Sunday forenoon in May 1980, I observed a crow feeding on insects on a back lawn in Rosthern. Its peculiar manner of feeding, to my knowledge, has not been reported in the literature. This bird, as it stalked the short grass on this bright sunny day, held its wings partly out in a kind of "spread-eagle" pose and then pecked for insects in the shadow it was creating. This it continued to do for several minutes.

I was reminded of a cormorant's typical posture, and this in turn recalled for me a television program I had seen a few years ago in the CTV "Untamed World" series. It showed some herons in Africa, holding their wings "akimbo" in order to shade the water's surface and so facilitate their feeding on small fish.

Of course, there may have been some physiological reason for the crow to hold out its wings, but its other movements and its flight later gave no evidence of it. To me, it appeared as though the bird also had adopted this pose to aid its feeding — either it could see better itself in the glare of the sun, or else the insects would move more freely in the shaded grass and so expose themselves to view.

Bent reports that in May insects make up 21% of a crow's diet and that nesting



Crow.

Blake Maybank

crows need even larger quantities of insect food. My observation was during this month, and the crow may have been exercising what Bent calls its "extreme resourcefulness in securing a livelihood." He further states that pet crows (and we assume other crows which normally are not observed as closely) "are known to be very adept at learning to meet new and previously inexperienced conditions."<sup>1</sup>

I had hoped to see further instances of this unusual behaviour before I reported on it; however, none have been forthcoming from the various crows inhabiting Rosthern. I can only concur with Forbush and May, who say: "Each Crow is a character."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>BENT, A. C. 1964 (reprint of 1946). Life histories of North American jays, crows, and titmice. Dover, New York, 495 pp.

<sup>2</sup>FORBUSH, E. H., and J. R. MAY. 1939. Natural history of the birds of eastern and central North America. Houghton Mifflin, Boston. 554 pp.

<sup>3</sup>FRIESEN, V. C. 1977. Do crows say caw? Blue Jay 35:35-37.

<sup>4</sup>HOUSTON, C. S. 1977. Changing patterns of Corvidae on the prairies. Blue Jay 35:149-156.

<sup>5</sup>HOUSTON, C. S. 1980. Fall crow roosts in residential Saskatoon. Blue Jay 38:42-43.