

RAVENS, CROWS, MAGPIES, AND JAYS

TONY ANGELL, 1978. University of Washington Press, Seattle and London. 112 pp. Cloth, \$14.95 U.S.

This large format (8¾" x 11¼") book concerns itself with the birds of the family Corvidae found in North America north of Mexico. The three prairie Provinces have 7 species of corvids (plus the hypothetical Pinon Jay) found in a wide variety of habitats, from mountain heights to the prairies and the coniferous forests of the north. They are the most familiar of birds, yet few take the time to admire and study them. Indeed, the magpie and crow are said to be the bane of the farmer's existence, and are persecuted, hunted and poisoned. Decried as agricultural pests and nest robbers, they are at the same time the most intelligent of birds and worthy in many respects of our admiration.

The book is divided into two main sections, the first a "cast of characters" introducing and describing 17 North American species, plus the native crow, or Alala, of the Hawaiian Islands. It is perhaps here that the book is weakest. Each species account comprises two pages, a full page illustration by the author-artist and a page of text. It is the text that I would criticize. More space could have been devoted to details of description, range and migration, habitat, food, and nesting. To be sure, these subjects are all touched upon, but in many cases there is only half a page of text, and in some ac-

counts half or more of this is devoted to personal or historical anecdotes of questionable value. Admittedly this is in keeping with the over-all feel of the book, but the second section provides a more suitable place for this type of narrative. More basic information in the first section would have made the book more useful.

An example is the page on the Common Crow. Little is really said, and here I found one of the very few obvious errors. The author states that there are three races or subspecies, while both Bent and the A.O.U. *Checklist* list four. In his only departure from A.O.U. *Checklist* nomenclature, he lumps the Northwestern Crow with the Common Crow, and half of the account is devoted to this "race." Though the Northwestern Crow may ultimately be relegated to subspecific status, it has not yet been, and I would have liked to see each given a full page with meatier information.

It is in the second section that the book really shines, and becomes more than just a picture-book. Under six chapter headings, the author discusses the mythology, behaviour, ecology and adaptations of these birds in a style that is immensely readable and informative. The reader who has not studied this group will be surprised at the wealth of fascinating data, all supported by references to original sources. His curiosity piqued by a multitude of fascinating tid-bits he may pursue his interests further by consulting the bibliography of 184 titles.

The author lives in the state of Washington, and has studied corvids



Scrub Jay, Illustration from the book

in many areas across the continent. His own experiences, especially in the Pacific Northwest, give this book a personal touch which, like the illustrations, illuminates the intelligence and personable nature of these birds. One is at once informed and entertained, and the book is hard to put down.

It is the art work that will first catch the reader's eye. At least every second page has an illustration, and many of them spill over on to the page facing. These black-and-white drawings portray their subjects in all the diversity of their activities and behaviour. What Angell has achieved here is a distillation of the essence of corvid life, and a joyous portrayal of

the business of being a bird. Details are not always anatomically correct, and at times the perspective is startling (as in the "Raven chasing Goshawk") but these faults are easily overlooked in the artist's total achievement.

The researcher looking for a mine of solid information on the North American Corvidae will have to look elsewhere, as in Derek Goodwin's *Crows of the World* (New York 1976). For the birder and naturalist curious about crows and their kind this is a superb introduction to the family, one certain to make the observer more observant when he or she next encounters a member of this diverse family. The first crow of spring will no longer be the only one to hold your interest after you read this book. Highly recommended. — Reviewed by *Bob Kreba*, Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History, Regina, Saskatchewan.

WILD COFFEE AND TEA SUBSTITUTES OF CANADA

ADAM SZCZAWINSKI and NANCY TURNER. 1978. National Museums of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. 111 p. \$6.95.

This book is a good field guide to native plants that can be steeped and brewed for beverages. Each of 37 species is described under the following headings — how to recognize, where to find, warnings and necessary cautions, and how to use (sometimes with recipes). The book also tells how these plants were used in the past for beverage and medicinal purposes.

The introduction sketches the history of coffee and tea as well as