

CLEVER CROWS DUNK FOOD IN WATER

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The slow cool spring of 2021, coupled with recovery time from surgery, allowed me a great deal of uncommitted time to enjoy our west-facing deck, which has a clear view of two feeders and a large water dish. There was an unprecedented number and variety of birds that spent at least some time in our neighbourhood. It was marvelous and I do believe I saw every sparrow-like bird in my field guide, as well as all the woodpeckers, doves, and chickadees that made brief stops for food and water.

However, this missive is inspired by a pair of American Crows (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) that were nesting in a spruce tree in the yard across the easement. As a matter of course I spread small amounts of bird-friendly table scraps underneath the feeders; stale bread and overcooked toast were often part of the menu. The crows had likely laid eggs and were sometimes busy in the yard despite my presence.

One afternoon, I was being very quiet and a crow picked up a hard piece of toast, flew directly to the bird bath and dunked the morsel in the water. It appeared to check me out for a second and then retrieved the now wet scrap out of the water and swallowed it. I had never seen anything like that before. I remained sitting and within 10 minutes the crow did it again. Wow. The bird cleaned up all the dried scraps in similar fashion. I explained my observations to my wife, who is often skeptical of my observations given my social science background. She thinks

I confuse things with the hard science done on birds.

Two days later, when my wife returned home after a round of golf, she said she now believed my crow story because she had witnessed the same thing as she came into the house only minutes ago. Hmm said I — there had been no old toast laid out during the past 48 hours. That then raised the question of the birds stockpiling food for dunking, which is not uncommon in the bird world, but certainly not a behaviour I had seen any crow undertake. 🐦



An American Crow with a piece of toast at the bird bath. Photo credit: Robert D. Loewen.

CORRECTION NOTICE

In the article The Black Witch Moth – A Rare Prairie Visitor (Volume 79.2 Summer 2021), the location Avonlea should be removed from paragraph five and the number of Saskatchewan sightings of the moth reduced to 20. Note that the digital version of Volume 79.2 already reflected these amendments at the time of issue. 🐦