

The co-existence between the raven and man

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Introduction

As evolution progresses, human domination has made a great impact over various species and ecosystems throughout centuries, being responsible for mainly the endangerment and extinction of some but also for the proliferation of others. One example of a species that has benefited from human presence is the common raven (*Corvus corax*), an invasive species that through the actions of humans has drastically increased in population through the years.

On the other hand, the influence of Ravens on human culture is also very extensive and can be traced back for centuries. Since the beginning of their interactions, one can detect the respect and awe humans have had towards them. Myth, fairytales and legend have evolved around these birds and in some cultures were even considered as god's helpers. However, this all subsided as humans became more and more agricultural, leading to the competition between the ravens and humans as these intelligent birds began to steal food and raiding their crops. Furthermore, as time progressed, and in particularly in the times of the plague and dark battles, ravens were associated with death and disease, scavenging on the corpses of the damned victims. In modern times they gained the symbol of evil and death that can be seen throughout literature and classic Hollywood film such as by the inspired poet Edgar Allen Poe and Alfred Hitchcock⁽¹⁾.

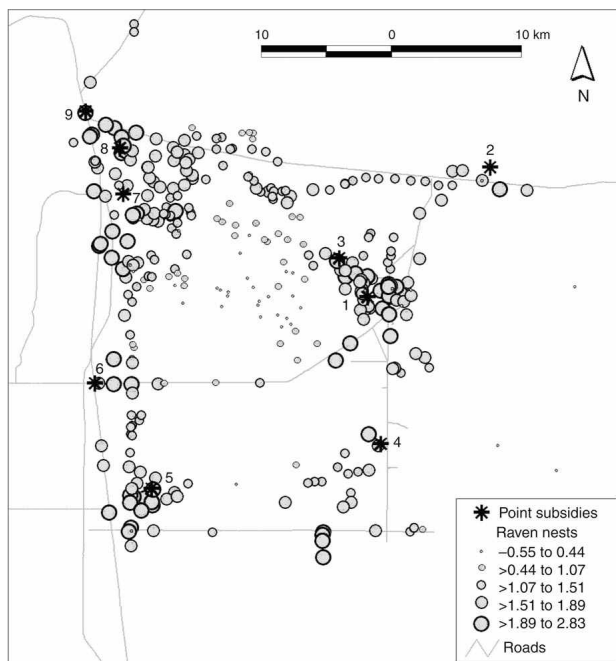
Today

Returning to our time, one example of raven domination is in the Mojave Desert region and in Nevada, USA. Common raven populations in this region have roamed in the past 30-50 years, with an estimated 15 fold population increase (Boarman and Berry 1995, Camp et al 1995).

In addition to their population booming, they have also been a major cause for the decline of threatened or endangered species such as the Desert Tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*) (Liebezeit and George 2002) ⁽²⁾.

This massive increase can be explained directly by the resources that humans have provided the ravens with, for example water, food from agriculture and campgrounds or road kill carrion. (Marzluff et al. 2006).

The human impact on various regions across the US also aided in substantial nesting opportunities such as telephone poles, trees and bridges. In addition, the Raven's reproductive success and spatial distribution has intensified due to its proximity to anthropogenic subsidies (Boarman 1993).



Distribution of raven nests relative to major point sources of anthropogenic food and water subsidies and to major paved roads. Sizes of nest symbols are proportionate to the predicted number of years of successful breeding, having controlled for the number of years of observation of nests. Identities of point subsidies are: 1, Edwards Air Force Base; 2, North Edwards; 3, Edwards landfill; 4, Branch Park; 5, Piute Ponds; 6, Rosamond; 7, Mojave landfill; 8, Mojave sewage ponds; 9, Mojave.

Ravens in the city

Due to the prosecutions of ravens in Europe for centuries, it is interesting to see that today they are extremely shy and rare and can be seen in only a few cities such as Berlin, Warsaw, Moscow and Amsterdam, in comparison to the north American raven.

Nowadays, the city's subsidies offer much innovation and unique opportunities for the ravens nesting materials, such as clothes hangers (Kubota 2004), a fact that could be solely related to the presence of humans. In the city, interactions are evident also in the active feeding nature of humans.

New varieties of food consumption can also be linked to human presence. For example, the garbage and waste used by the ravens has in evidently an effect on their diet and "opportunistic" behavior, forcing humans to change their methods of garbage disposal (Connell 2003; Shida 2001).

An additional observation for raven and human interactions is seen in Sendai, Japan. The ravens there lay walnuts underneath vehicles that are waiting at traffic lights. When the Cars start to accelerate, they would crush the walnuts giving the ravens the opportunity to fly down and collect the cracked meat. Interestingly, this behavior is known to have spread slowly from the place it was first observed 20 years ago, a fact that could be contributed to social learning by these intelligent animals (Nihei and Higuchi 2001)⁽³⁾.

In another area of the world, Israel, one of the most intelligent observations yet to be seen was recorded. Ravens have been observed to feed fish in ponds with bread they acquired from humans in order to catch them when surfacing ⁽⁴⁾.

Conclusion

It is hard to think of other non-domesticated animals with which humans have such a varied and rich relationship, in comparison to the close relationship with our domesticated animals such as the horse, dog and cat.

So what makes the relationship of Humans and ravens so unique then? The sentence "It takes one to know one" could be applied in this context perhaps. Is it because the humans have recognized the raven's intelligence, cooperation, deviousness and sociality and made him see a kind of reflection of himself?

Although maybe quite a few people would not be too happy to be compared to the raven's character as again, it is seen today in a rather negative light, there is so much more to them than what folklore and legends have implied them to be.



On this site stood a scaffold on which
were executed:

- | | |
|--|-------------|
| Queen Anne Boleyn Second wife of Henry VIII | 19 May 1536 |
| Margaret, Countess of Salisbury Last Plantagenet princess | 27 May 1541 |
| Queen Katherine Howard Fifth wife of Henry VIII | 13 Feb 1542 |
| John Viscount Rochford Wife of Anne Boleyn's brother | 13 Feb 1542 |
| | 12 Feb 1542 |

As described so accurately by Reverend Henry Ward Beecher

***“If men had wings and bore black
feathers, few of them would be
clever enough to be ravens”***

References

- 1) Marzluff JM, Angell T (2005), In the company of crows and ravens. Yale University Press.
- 2) William b. Kristan III and William Boarman (2007), Effects of anthropogenic developments on common raven nesting biology in the west Mojave Desert. Ecological applications, 17(6), The ecological society of America.
- 3) Marzluff and Angell Vol. 9 (2005), Cultural Co-evolution: How the Human Bond with Crows and Ravens Extends Theory and Raises New Questions.
- 4) Crow in Israel movie http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y_8hPcnGeCl