WILDLIFE NOTES

RAVENS
Common Raven and Chihuahuan Raven

When early hunters came across the Bering Straits, they would have found ravens a familiar element, awaiting their share of the kills.

RANGE
No other bird has a wider distribution or shows more adaptability than the Common Raven, *Corvus corax*. They survive arctic winters and Death Valley summers. They range from the northern Arctic to deserts of North Africa; they can be found in Eurasia, in Mexico and Central America and across the United States.

The Chihuahuan Raven (*Corvus cryptoleucus*) has a restricted range: the southwestern U.S. including southeastern Arizona, southern New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma and Mexico; north-eastern Colorado; and portions of western Kansas and south-central Nebraska.

HABITAT
The larger Common Raven is often found in the wooded foothills, inter montane grasslands and forested mountains of the state, especially in regions with cliffs or ledges. The Chihuahuan Raven prefers more arid landscapes like deserts and mesquite grasslands. Common Ravens are abundant in the northern areas of New Mexico, Chihuahuan Ravens in the south.

DESCRIPTION
Common Ravens are the largest songbirds of North America; they weigh several times as much as much as American Crows. Adults are approximately 23-27 inches long and their wingspan doubles that. They weigh 2 to 3 ½ pounds. The feathers are uniformly glossy black. When perched, they have a noticeable ‘dewlap’ of shaggy feathers around the neck. The wings are long and pointed, the tail wedge-shaped. The beak, feet and heavy bill are black.

The Chihuahuan Raven is a similar but smaller bird. At 17-21 inches, it is slightly larger than a crow. An old name for the Chihuahuan Raven was White-necked Raven, but the white is only at the base of the neck (and breast) feathers and seldom visible in the field unless wind ruffles the feathers. *Cryptoleucus* means “hidden white”

Many people confuse crows with ravens. Crows are smaller, have squared-off or fan-shaped tails, and more slender bills. Ravens often soar, crows never do. If the bird does a barrel roll, it’s definitely a raven. Crows caw; ravens croak and mutter. Raven voices are more varied and much deeper and throatier than the crow’s monotonous nasal call.

BEHAVIOR
Both species are chiefly resident but may wander in winter or in response to food availability. Common Ravens are most often seen in pairs or flying singly; they are not as gregarious as either crows or Chihuahuan Ravens who will congregate into lively and garrulous crowds, especially in winter.

Both ravens are very acrobatic and quick flyers. They will cache surplus food in between rocks or crevices, or hide it under leaves or debris. They will also carry off shiny objects totally unfit for food and will stash them in their nests.

Can we squawk?
The specific name of the Common Raven, *corax*, is from Greek,
watch where other ravens hide returning later to eat it. They also
Ravens often hide surplus food, berries and, of course, carrion.
eat eggs, seeds, waste grain, small vertebrates. They will also
live prey including insects and much as half of their diet can be
from fur seals to french fries. As
pick at the remains of dead ani-
anything. Ravens do more than
ravens allow them to eat most
large powerful beaks of
their food, then raid these
DIET/FEEDING
The large powerful beaks of
ravens allow them to eat most
anything. Ravens do more than
pick at the remains of dead ani-
mals. Ravens will eat everything
from fur seals to french fries. As
much as half of their diet can be
live prey including insects and
small vertebrates. They will also
eat eggs, seeds, waste grain,
berries and, of course, carrion.
Ravens often hide surplus food,
returning later to eat it. They also
watch where other ravens hide

BEAKS
The large powerful beaks of
ravens allow them to eat most
anything. Ravens do more than
pick at the remains of dead ani-
mals. Ravens will eat everything
from fur seals to french fries. As
much as half of their diet can be
live prey including insects and
small vertebrates. They will also
eat eggs, seeds, waste grain,
berries and, of course, carrion.
Ravens often hide surplus food,
returning later to eat it. They also
watch where other ravens hide

REPRODUCTION
Both species are monoga-
mous, the pairs remain-
ing together outside the
breeding season and possibly for life.

Common Ravens typically
breed in spring, building
massive stick nests in
inaccessible places like
clifftops, wind eroded shel-
ter caves and infrequently
in tall trees or powerpoles.
Chihuahuan Ravens build
in mesquite, catclaw, tall
yuccas or even in old
buildings. Female ravens will lay
4-8 eggs, which are greenish,
blotched with brown. Both parents
care for the young. Fledglings
may remain with their parents
for six months but form juvenile
flocks in the fall.

CONSERVATION
Ravens have had their ups and
downs. As settlement spread west,
ravens initially declined until they
were quite rare in certain parts
of their range. Ravens may have
been shot as vermin; the demise
of large predators like the grizzly
and the wolf may have reduced
the availability of carcasses for
scavenging. Today ravens are en-
joying prosperous times as "subsi-
dized predators". Their populations
are increasing across much of the
west, most likely because they
have learned to take advantage
of human-related food sources:
garbage, roadkill, and agricul-
tural fields. Not all the populations
have rebounded so dramatically.
New England ravens were locally
exterminated and only recently
have begun to recover. The Com-
mon Raven is state-endangered
in Kentucky, state-threatened in
Tennessee and is on the North
Carolina Watch List as a "species
rare to uncommon".

The greatest danger ravens face
is from humans. Even though
ravens are protected through the
Migratory Bird Treaty Act, they
have suffered much at the hands
of varmint shooters. They are un-
fortunately viewed as pests, even
though they prey on rodents, in-
sects, carrion, and even noxious
weed seeds. Many are hit by cars
in urban areas.

Adult ravens have few predators,
although larger hawks and owls
take some. Brood losses result
from starvation, adverse weather
and predation by Raccoons, Great-
horned Owls and other predators.

The stuff of tribal legends, Shake-
peare’s plays and Poe’s most
famous poem, ravens have been
revered and reviled. For their
beneficial roles in the ecosystem
and for the joy their antics add to
our lives, we should ensure that
they are with us...evermore.