

Hi Green Team, Bluebird Team and OCVN!

You'll notice that I am now combining e-mails. There are so many of you I decided it would be best.

Apple picking, pumpkins, and the last green tomatoes are how I'd sum up my fall thus far. It's my favorite season. I love feeling the coziness of a fire and the feeling of a soft sweater. The heat of summer has allowed me to relish the cooler temperatures; at least I'll relish them until about January. Of course November also brings thoughts and feelings of thanks giving.

When I take the time to consider what I'm thankful for I realize it's not money or possessions. Of course I am thankful for a roof over my head, but it's *who* fills my home that makes the difference. Being surrounded by friends and loved ones is what I'm most thankful for. Humans are not the only beings on Earth to share this sentiment. Crows are one of my favorite birds because of their family ties. I just looked back through my e-mail archives and realized I've not written about crows. I'm surprised, especially because I'm so fond of them!

Usually when I state this folks ask WHY? Well, because crows are amazing. They are very sweet and playful birds with incredible family bonds. Firstly, they mate for life. The pair will raise young together, sharing responsibilities. Eventually, the young will grow and perhaps bring their mate into the family fold. The parents might even give part of their territory to the young couple. Furthermore, siblings often help care for new broods and Cornell University reports that up to 5 generations might stay together.

Crows are intelligent and most often stories are shared about their counting capabilities. They're great at recognizing people and have been known to visit friendly humans for peanuts. Crows recognize each other by a type of name. I've heard this is similar to dolphins, but can't remember the source. Nicholas S. Thompson, psychology professor at Clark University in Worcester, Mass., has studied crow communication for nearly 40 years. He has written that each crow's caws identify that individual bird. This allows crows to keep track of others nearby and who they are.

Laurence Pringle explains in his book "Listen to Crows" how crows identify themselves. They can make long or short sounds, a certain number of sounds at one time, and pause in between sounds. "The pattern [of caws] is like a name, but a crow doesn't have to keep the same 'name' forever," he writes. "Or maybe they each have a few favorite patterns and switch when crows of similar patterns are nearby." I equate this to knowing the sound of a loved ones voice.

My thoughts about crows really changed when I heard a professor of ornithology speak several years ago. The stories he shared were fascinating and one in particular was very touching. The ornithologist went through a series of slides as he shared a story of a sickly female crow sitting on a fence. Her eyes were crusty and she was unable to open them. Over a period of several snowy, winter days her family fed her and nursed her back to health. He was certain without of the aide of her family, she would have died.

Unfortunately Crows tend to be seen as villains. Of course Alfred Hitchcock did them no service with the making of “The Birds”. Regardless, their intelligence can get them into trouble. They’re known for crop destruction and making a raucous when roosting. I often hear about a crow with a baby bunny in its beak. Like humans, they’ll go for the easiest meal every time, conserving energy. Nevertheless, they are true omnivores and eat nuts, seeds, and anything that is easy to find.

This is a great time of year to watch crows. Without leaves, you might even spot last spring’s nest. Nests about the size of a record and thick, made up of larger branches on the outside and smaller twigs and soft items on the inside. Yes, they do typically choose a nest site with a view! You’ll see crows flying to keep warm on the coldest of days. You might even see them congregating in larger groups this time of year. Perhaps they’re sharing what they’re thankful for!

I am thankful to work with so many wonderful volunteers. I hope each of you has time with loved ones and friends. Happy Thanksgiving.

All my best,

Mime