

urban antics

by John Hunter



Stark raven mad

It is a well-documented fact that the Australian raven (*Corvus coronides*) has benefited from agricultural development in this country.

Commonly referred to as the crow, the raven has followed human establishment into the hearts of our cities and suburbs where handouts, refuse, unsecured bins and natural food such as insects, fruit, young or weak animals and carrion are easy pickings.

As humans, a good many of us do not like to share our backyards with these clever interlopers which have attitude, boldness, squawking ability and an aptitude for stealing. For those of us who don't sweat the small stuff and enjoy free oxygen, the entertainment is medicine for the soul. All others will need to get a life, I'm afraid.

This autumn past has brought long lingering months of exceptionally beautiful warm, still weather just at the time when the juveniles and non breeders (younger than three to four years old) group together during their learning and moult time. The foraging groups become gang-like

and outrageous in their quest for food, status and, seemingly, a better education.

Early mornings can find four or five ravens congregating around your back door waiting for Fido's bikkie bowl replenishment, while another group hurls abusive gargles, gawks and grizzles from the safety of pencil pines that have been teased and frisked for spiders and insects. The ravens may also entice a certain resident shitzu dog to attempt to squeeze through the railing on a first floor balcony in a bid to catch a raven and add some protein to the menu. It's better entertainment than Northbridge at midnight and I wouldn't mind betting this is the occasion each year when the term 'a murder of crows' seems to become a necessity rather than an exception.

Tolerance in life is imperative and we must be thankful for nature's gift of company and entertainment. I do feel sorry for those whining brats in council flats that find it necessary to want these 'wise guys' destroyed. And you can also get valuable exercise by having to regularly shoo away these black baskets full of boisterous bother.

After autumn, the groups of ravens around my place dissipate throughout chosen territories; many juveniles don't make it through winter, but new pairs which bond for life go about business more sedately. In early winter, they prepare to mate and gather coconut fibre from my favourite Bali lanterns. I bite my tongue and put the lanterns away.

On the outside of reflective glass windows, dominant birds strut their stuff and joust with their own images while others soar to extreme heights in the questionable company of galahs and magpies to despatch solitary straying hawks.

In a local park, among the cascades of leaf and branch, a dark sentinel may burst forth with a long drawn out expletive as if to frighten small children or perhaps announce his presence and stamp the territory.

At the Department of Environment and Conservation Kensington cafeteria courtyard, with their wildlife officer mates looking down, a pair of ravens often stands face to face, bent over a small object, oblivious of the humans, and talking to one another. It sort of sounds like - "What'll-we-do-with-this-bit-of-biota-luv,- eat-it-or-pinch-it?"

I-don't-give-a-rats,-let's-nick-it-and-get-outa-here."

You wouldn't be dead for quids would you.

DID YOU KNOW?

- This tale can be read in conjunction with 'Urban Antics' in the *LANDSCOPE* edition of Spring 1996.
- Ravens do become a nuisance when humans leave foodscraps and unlidded bins about. They are clever, they are persistent and they have a right to share the planet.

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Publishing credits

Executive Editor Ron Kawailak.

Editors Samille Mitchell, Rhianna King.

Scientific/technical advice

Kevin Kenneally, Paul Jones, Keith Morris.

Design and production Natalie Jolakoski, Tiffany Taylor, Gooitzen van der Meer.

Illustration Gooitzen van der Meer.

Cartography Promaco Geodraft.

Marketing Estelle de San Miguel.

Phone (08) 9334 0296 Fax (08) 9334 0432.

Subscription enquiries

Phone (08) 9334 0481 or (08) 9334 0437.

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