

IT will be no surprise to Metropolitan residents that ravens (*Corvus coronoides*) in the Perth area have increased in abundance by 27.3% since 1977, according to a study by P. Stewart of Edith Cowan University.

Ravens are omniverous, consuming meat, eggs, insects, fruit, bread, seeds, berries and even flower parts. They are opportunistic feeders, switching diet according to food availability, and in built-up areas often act as scavengers. The study showed that, in Kings Park, the greater the number of humans using an area, the greater the number of ravens likely to be found there.

The increase in available food probably accounts for the increase of birds in Perth, as their other requirement – suitable roosting and nesting trees – has actually decreased. Nesting site availability probably determines which suburbs have most ravens, as ravens nest, on average, between 10 and 25 metres above ground. Therefore they tend to be scarce in new suburbs, with

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Ravens in Perth

their closely-spaced buildings, tiny gardens and few large trees. In addition, ravens are large, aggressive birds, so they can effectively dominate feeding situations, nor are they threatened by cat or dog predation.

Many people consider ravens a problem because

- ◆ they make too much noise
- ◆ they attack other animals, eg taking hen's eggs and chicks, goldfish, tortoises and lizards
- ◆ they make a mess when scavenging in rubbish bags and bins

- ◆ they could spread disease, eg moving directly from rubbish to picnic baskets
- ◆ they cause damage – eg pecking flywire, pulling out window putty and messing up reticulation
- ◆ they steal – golf balls, for example; do they mistake them for eggs? - or drop dog bones into roof gutters!

However, it could well be that their scavenging activity around picnic sites is actually beneficial, as it cleans up mess that would otherwise be left for rats and mice. They're also pretty smart birds!

Many animals have been disadvantaged since European settlement of Australia, the raven is clearly one that has benefitted.

Stewart, P.J. 1997. "Some aspects of the ecology of an urban corvid: the Australian raven (Corvus coronoides) in Metropolitan Perth." Honours Thesis, Edith Cowan University.