

Crow flocks a sure sign of spring

By Art Briggs-Jude
Of all the visible signs of spring, none is more apparent than the reappearance of the common crow. Oh, it's true the March calendars annually proclaim the first spring day as the 21st, but Nature's signs

are much more meaningful. Often for example on the official calendar day, blowing snow or rawside winds chill our bones and dim our hopes. But the sighting of a groundhog in a neighboring field or the glimpse of a redwinged

blackbird settling on a bleached tree stirs our hearts with warm expectations. So it is with the first sights and sounds of the familiar crows. Drifting across the snow-patched fields or calling from the naked hedgerows they seem to

signal the start of a whole new season. In fact an old farmer once told me that the crows were as happy to be back as we were to see them. "Listen to 'em", he'd say, "Why they're over there laughing their fool heads off, cause old wicked

winter is running out of kicks." "Haw-Haw-Haw", was the way he interpreted their spring call, and sometimes at this season of the year, I listen to them and think he may have been right. To say the crow has benefited somewhat from

the settlement of this country would be a gross understatement. Formerly a bird of the open prairies and shoreline spaces it quickly moved eastward with the clearing of the forest. It soon found these open fields and borders were

popular places for feeding and nesting and their numbers increased tremendously. However, it's appetite for sprouting grain was not appreciated by the struggling homesteaders who tried every means to make their hard cleared land a

lot less popular to the large chony birds. But the crow is a crafty individual and despite several hundred years of persecution by every means, it still remains one of our most numerous birds. To fully realize the

crow population in your area you really have to visit a crow roost during the winter months. Although most crows in these parts migrate further south for the winter, in some sheltered sections of the country, crows gather nightly in

large communal roosts. One afternoon not so long ago, I cached myself in just such a roost near Port Weller at the northern entrance to the Welland Canal. Gazing upwards through the canopy of naked branches you see a single crow glide by at treetop height. When there is no alarm from these early arriving scouts, others begin to drift in, silent silhouettes against the half gray light of the early evening sky. Soon the main flock comes wheeling in and the lacy limb patterns above are covered with thousands of wriggling black shapes all jostling for position. In a matter of minutes a huge, dark mushroom has formed overhead literally snuffing out any remaining light.

To test their reaction to a common enemy close by, you step from concealment and clap your hands sharply. The swoosh of wings, instantly followed by the roar of alarm is deafening. It sounds somewhat like the unleashed voice of a huge crowd when the deciding point has been scored at a sports spectacle. It also has an unnerving effect on your system, for as you watch and listen to the reeling horde flailing about in the dusky sky you begin to wonder. What for instance would happen if they suddenly decided to turn their attention on you, their human intruder. Using the same communication that alerts them to danger could they conceivably spread the signal to attack. How helpless I would be if they like the Piranha fish each swooped in for a single bite. With these thoughts in mind I quietly left the wooded grove to its black-feathered occupants.

Such a big bird as a crow demands an equally large appetite. When we multiply this by the number of individuals seen at their roost, we get some idea of the influence these birds exert on the surrounding countryside. Each day for example during this cold weather roosting season, the black fliers range out as far as fifty miles to feed, then return each evening. Their principle food during this season is waste grain, old fruit, refuse and carrion.

In early spring they forsake these communal night spots and spread in pairs over the province for nesting. Although their depredations on nesting songbirds are well known, the overall effect on individual species is debatable. However, Ducks Unlimited and other field studies show that in clutches of eggs laid by gamebirds, scarcely one brood in four escapes the predation of these black egg-loving marauders.

Gormley welcomes refugees

By Evelyn Millsted
GORMLEY—Two Cantonese refugees, Thu and Tai Tran, sponsored by the Gormley Missionary Church, arrived last week. The church committee entertained their brother-in-law and sister and five children to a pot-luck dinner. They have been living in Toronto for fifteen months.

Rhonda Heise and Mark Hall will be honored at a miscellaneous shower, Thurs., April 10 at 8 p.m., in the Victoria Square Community Hall. Rhonda and Mark are being married in May.

Mr. and Mrs. Michael Schultz and family have moved to their new home at Acton. Mrs. Schultz was a part-time worker in the Post Office.

Mr. and Mrs. Walter Brillinger and family have returned from a two-week holiday in Florida and the Bahamas.

Mr. and Mrs. Johan Christiansen and children have enjoyed a week's holiday in Mexico. Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd Hall have returned after two months in Florida. Mr. and Mrs. David Heise and girls of Lowbanks and Mr. and Mrs. Harry Nigh of Toronto were recent week-end guests of their parents, Mr. and Mrs. Russell Heise.

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