

**Species Snapshot- American Crow**

**Prepared by and date:** Lauren Johnson, August 2014

**Order:** Passeriformes

**Family:** Corvidae

**Scientific Name:** *Corvus brachyrhynchos*

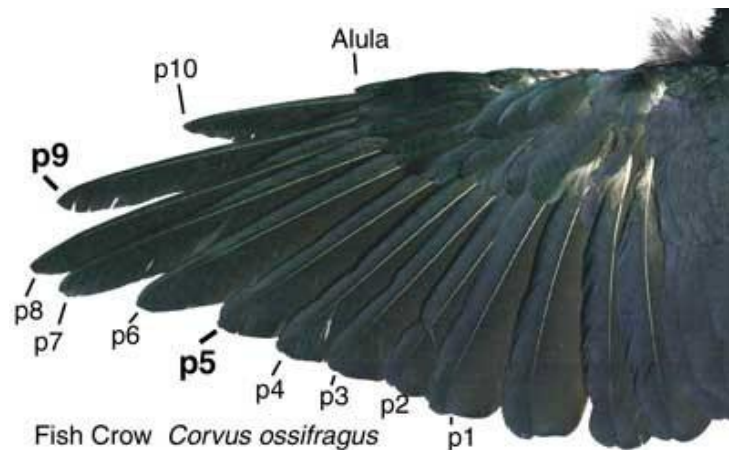
**Common Name(s):** American Crow

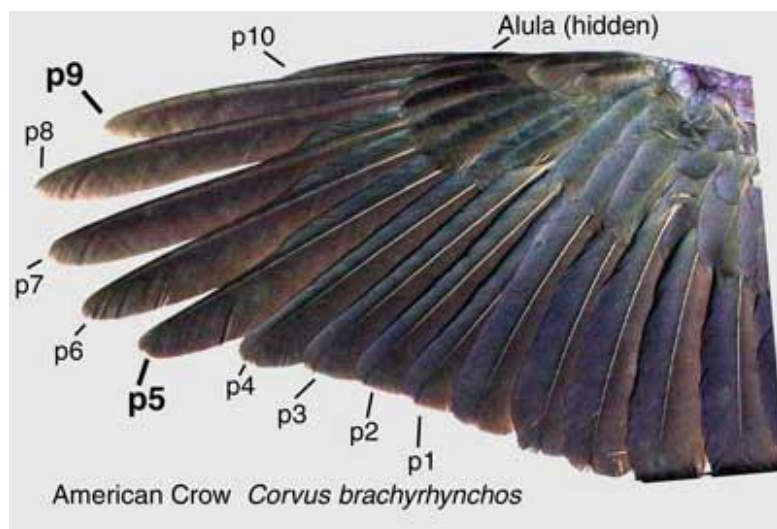
**Conservation Status (reportable and to whom):** Least Concern

**Notes:** Hunting crows is legal in many regions.

**Description/Adult:** American Crows are medium-sized corvids. They are all black though feathers may have a violet sheen. They have a black bill and nares covered with stiff feathers. The tail is slightly rounded. Males are slightly larger than females.

**How to tell apart from Fish Crow:** American Crows are very similar to Fish Crows in appearance. The call of a Fish Crow is more nasal than the caw of the American Crow. However, begging calls of young American Crows can sound like Fish Crows. Fish Crows are smaller than American Crows: they can weigh 195-330 grams instead of the 316-575 grams an American Crow can weigh. In American Crows, P5 is much longer than P9, but in the Fish Crow, P5 and P9 are similar in size.





One difference between crows that may be a reliable indicator in the young is tarsus length. The American Crow has a medium-short tarsus that is 54-66.5 mm long. The Fish Crow has a short tarsus that is 41.5-49.6 mm long. The tarsus length is the length between the intertarsal joint and the distal end of the last leg scale before the toes emerge:



**Body Temperature:** According to Nemeth et al. (2011), cloacal temperatures are 43-44°C. According to Verbeek and Caffrey (2002), body temperature is 40.2 +/- 0.6 at ambient temperatures of 10-30°C and is 41.4°C +/- 9.8 at 37.5°C. Body temperature can drop to 38°C at ambient temperatures less than 10°C.

**Diet: Spring/Summer/Fall/Winter:** American Crows are omnivorous. They eat invertebrates, amphibians, reptiles, fish, small birds and mammals, birds' eggs and young, grains, seeds, fruits, and carrion. They will fly after birds such as House Sparrows and Starlings and kill them.

**Eating Habits (food storage, etc):** May cache surplus food in holes in the ground. Crows forage alone or in groups ranging to a large flock. Crows have been observed using tools such as pecking at a piece of wood and then using it to make a hole in a fence post.

**Weight Ranges: (include from birth/hatch to adult)** The mass at hatching is 15.6 +/- 3.7 g SD. At 10.8 days, young may weigh around 185 grams. Young generally do not grow larger than 370 grams before fledging. Adult crows usually weigh 316-575 grams.

**Measurements: (include from birth/hatch to adult)** Tarsus length is 100% of adult size (54-66.5 mm long) by 28 days. Adult males are generally larger than females. 86% of males have wings longer than 311 mm, while 88% of females have wings shorter than 308 mm. (Flattened wing length) Adult crows are generally 40-53 cm long and have a wingspan of 85-100 cm.

**Habitat:** American Crows live in practically any habitat except for unbroken expanses of forest or deserts. They will live in farmland, open woodland, landfills, yards, or the shores of rivers, etc.

**Home Range / territoriality:** Territory size varies from 0.72 ha/pair to 278 ha/pair. In a study on Cape Cod, mean territory size in cooperatively breeding crows was 42.1 ha/pair +/- 33.6 SD. Territory is often maintained throughout the year.

**Behavioral notes:** Crows will feed in flocks. The family may stay as a social unit throughout the year. Juveniles may "play" with bones, twigs, and leaves. Crows will roost together overnight.

**Reproductive Age:** Crows probably do not form pairs until their second spring after hatching.

**Molting:** Natal down completely replaced during Prejuvencal molt. Primaries are 75-100 mm out of sheaths on day 24-30. Prebasic molt I is partial and involves body plumage, some median wing-coverts, 0-3 inner greater wing-coverts, but not the rest of the wing or tail. The violet and bluish-green gloss of adult feathers is less distinct in the Basic I plumage. The wing and tail feathers not molted in Prebasic I molt are retained for about 13 months. The Definitive Prebasic molt is complete and begins at the end of June through September. Primaries and rectrices are replaced sequentially and symmetrically.

**Breeding:** Monogamous. However, many breed cooperatively. Nonbreeding adults and yearlings will help feed the incubating female and later the young. They may also guard nestlings and fledglings and help keep the nest clean. They also may assist in nest-building and brooding.

**Nest Size:** Clutches generally contain 4-5 eggs. Crows only have 1 brood per season.

**Nesting period:** Nesting can begin in February in Oklahoma, March in California, mid-March in Virginia, and April in Canada. Eggs are incubated for about 17-20 days until hatch. Eggs hatch asynchronously.

**Description – birth:** At birth, the young are altricial, covered in a little bit of down, and weigh an average of 15.6 g +/- 3.7 g. They are nidicolous (remain in the nest until they can fly).

**Juvenile/dependency period:** Brooding is more or less continuous for the first 9-14 days. Nestlings 2-11 days old are fed once every 35 minutes. The mean rate of feeding nestlings over the entire nestling period is about 4 times per hour.

**Fledge/independency:** Fledging occurs in late May to July in NE. This is when the young are about 30 days old. Feeding lasts up until 2 weeks or 4 months after fledging. Young may become completely independent at 1 month or 2 months after fledging. After 2 months of age, some crows join nonbreeding flocks, while others stay on their natal territory. They may become cooperative breeders the next year.

**Developmental steps – eyes/ears open, fur, feather eruption, etc:** Eyes begin to open at 5-6 days and are fully open at 10-13 days. They make their first sounds when they are about 4 days old. The yolk sac is no longer visible at 14 days. Feather tracts appear under the skin at 6-7 days and feathers of alar, humeral, spinal, and ventral tracts break through the skin at 10-12 days. Pin-feathers appear at day 10 and brushes appear at 15 days. Primaries 5-7 extend 2.5 cm beyond sheaths on the 21<sup>st</sup> day.

**Nutrition – Milk composition if known, types food offered:** Young are fed beetles, grasshoppers, bugs, caterpillars, fish, amphibians and reptiles, birds and eggs, rodents, corn, vegetables etc.

**Predators:** Nestlings and fledglings will be consumed by raccoons, Great Horned Owl, hawks, and cats. Eagles, goshawks, and owls may eat adults. Crows mob in response to predators.

**Diseases:** Blood parasites found in American Crows include *Trypanosoma ontarioensis* and *T. padoae* and *Isospora brachyrhynchi*. Crows can get Aspergillosis, lung tumors, avian cholera (*Pasteurella multocida*), particularly susceptible to West Nile Virus.

**Parasites:** Parasitic flies (*Protocalliphora*), dermestid beetles, carabid beetle, ants, and feather lice can be found in the nests of crows. Trematoda: *Brachylecithum stunkardi*, Cestoda: *Dilepis undata*, *Hymenolepis farciminosa*, *Schistocephalus solidus*, Nematoda: *Capillaria resecta*, *Cyathostoma lari*, *Splendidofilaria caperata*, Acanthocephala: *Prosthorhynchus formosum* have been reported in American crows. Four bird blow flies and chiggers have also been reported on crows.

**Sources:**

[http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/american\\_crow/lifehistory](http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/american_crow/lifehistory)

<http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/dfg/dfw/laws-regulations/plain-lang-sum/hunting-of-crows.html>

<http://www.birds.cornell.edu/crows/FishCrow.htm>

Nemeth, et al. 2011. Clinical and Pathologic Responses of American Crows (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) and Fish Crows (*C. ossifragus*) to Experimental West Nile Virus Infection. *USDA National Wildlife Research Center- Staff Publications*. Paper 1054.

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Verbeek, N. A. and C. Caffrey. 2002. American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*), *The Birds of North America Online* (A. Poole, Ed.). Ithaca: Cornell Lab of Ornithology; Retrieved from the Birds of North America Online