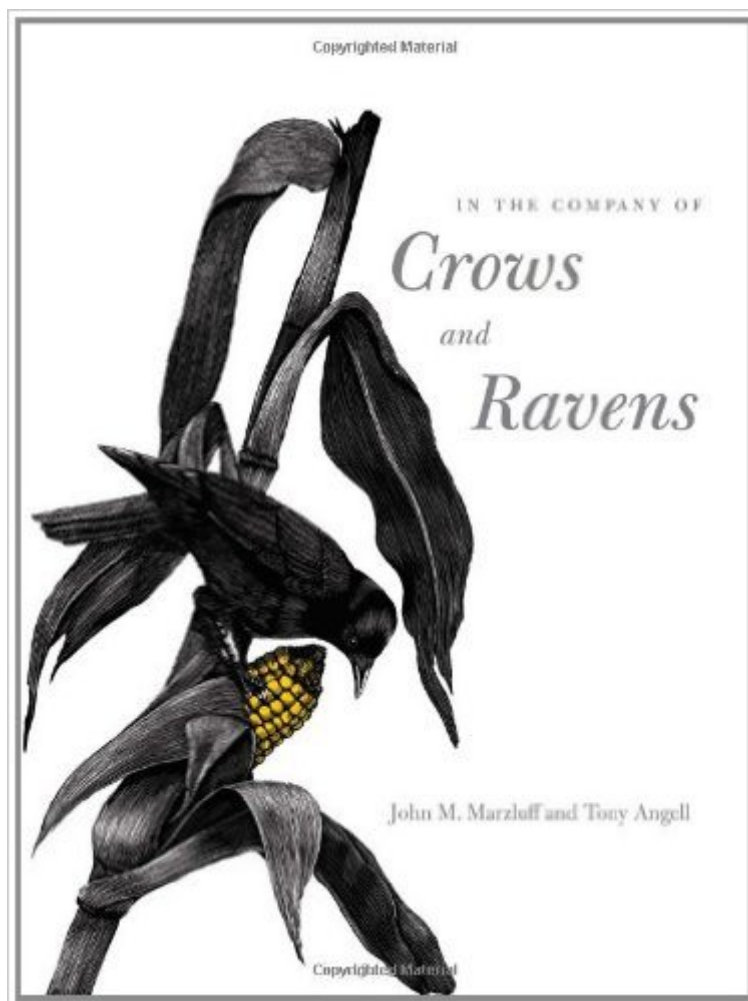


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In The Company Of Crows And Ravens



Synopsis

“Crows and people share similar traits and social strategies. To a surprising extent, to know the crow is to know ourselves.”—from the Preface

From the cave walls at Lascaux to the last painting by Van Gogh, from the works of Shakespeare to those of Mark Twain, there is clear evidence that crows and ravens influence human culture. Yet this influence is not unidirectional, say the authors of this fascinating book: people profoundly influence crow culture, ecology, and evolution as well. John Marzluff and Tony Angell examine the often surprising ways that crows and humans interact. The authors contend that those interactions reflect a process of “cultural coevolution.” They offer a challenging new view of the human-crow dynamic—a view that may change our thinking not only about crows but also about ourselves. Featuring more than 100 original drawings, the book takes a close look at the influences people have had on the lives of crows throughout history and at the significant ways crows have altered human lives. In *The Company of Crows and Ravens* illuminates the entwined histories of crows and people and concludes with an intriguing discussion of the crow-human relationship and how our attitudes toward crows may affect our cultural trajectory.

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Customer Reviews

"Gregarious, family grouped, long-lived, diurnal, vocally and visually astute, and reliant on memory and individual recognition." Yes, that might be a biological description of us humans, but it's a description from *In the Company of Crows and Ravens* (Yale University Press) by John M.

Marzluff and Tony Angell. We share those traits with the birds that are the subject of this fine book, mostly because we, like they, have big brains and use them. Dolphins and humans have bigger brain-to-body ratios, but the crow and raven ratio is something like that of most primates: "Mentally, crows and ravens are more like flying monkeys than they are like other birds." As a result, we have had a richer history of cooperating with these corvids (the family also includes rooks, jackdaws, and magpies) and competing against them. As a measure of our attention to these birds, for instance, this wide-ranging book cites their influence on our language; cats and dogs have more words, but no wild animal has more than crows and ravens. The examples include scarecrow, crow's feet, crowbar, and ravenous. We also crow about good news, but we also from time to time have to eat crow. We say "as the crow flies" when we want to indicate a linear distance between geographical points, but that's out of ignorance: crows take breaks and (as befits birds with brains) get distracted to check out other routes along the way. Crows and ravens have been our partners throughout history, and this broad and brightly-written book will increase anyone's appreciation for them and for the partnership. Crows and ravens are scavengers on what humans throw out; so are pigeons and seagulls, for that matter, but those aren't as intelligent or observant as corvids.

They lack the colour glories of parrots and lorikeets. They're not like the little tweetie birds of our childhood books. Probably the best known of them is Poe's bleak image - perched atop a skull croaking its dismal litany. Long before Poe, however, the corvids had gained a shady reputation in Western European legends and myths. Crows and ravens were messengers of dark fortunes sent by agents of evil intent. As is so often the case with relying on literature to depict Nature, the legends misled us. The reality is far more interesting and explains more than fiction ever has. Marzluff and Angell, are dedicated scholars in the history and legends of the corvids. This book reflects well that background, and their combined skills present what they've gleaned with style and wit. Perhaps no other species has shown how Darwinian adaptability can work as have crows, the authors suggest. Once wild and scattered, the crow has become habitated to human settlement. They were certainly scavengers at human feeding sites, whether people were hunters or scavengers themselves. Agriculture clearly brought them from the forests to the fields we planted. Grain crops - "the staff of life" - enticed them to our neighbourhoods quickly. The rise of cities only intensified the contact and offered the crow fresh opportunity. The "fast-food" restaurant, with its Dumpsters and scattered, food bearing trash, brings them hovering over what they clearly find a delicacy. They may even become selective, choosing the more brightly-coloured fries container over an equally laden drab one. It's even possible that the newly inhabited urban existence may be

enhancing their numbers. The hunting activities in farmland is lacking in the city, but there are many nesting sites.

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