

October 1, 2002 Issue

The Clever Corvid

Ed and I just spent a quiet moment in the garden picking ground cherries. If you have not experienced ground cherries, they are related to tomatoes, and tomatillos. Like tomatillos, they have a papery husk on the outside. You pop them out and eat them raw.



The fruit is golden, about 3/8th to 1/2 inch in diameter and when fully ripe, has a nutty, tomato like taste, and delightfully sweet. If there is a drawback, it is that there are lots of tiny hard seeds inside. The taste kind of grows on you. Some years the crop has been late in maturing, so the best we could harvest was a handful or two. This year, with the summer in Washington State so long and sunny, we have a bountiful supply of fresh ground cherries (with more ripening each sunny day.) We got the seeds originally from a grower in Oregon (Ed remembered eating ground cherries as a boy in the Willamette valley on his grandfather's farm). They are quite prolific growers and reseed themselves generously. We went onto the internet and found recipes for pies and jams from ground cherries. This evening I will try one of them. Wish me luck!

Next Issue: As Real As It Gets

"Corvid" is the nomenclature of the birds in the family corvidae, to include jays, crows, ravens, magpies and nutcrackers. Over one-third of the Corvid family is comprised of crows and ravens in the genus Corves. That is the technical information I found, however, my interest in crows and ravens is from a personal point of view.

There are many beautiful, colorful birds. There are song birds with lovely melodies, some complex, some a simple aria upon which a complete symphony can be composed. There are those whose exotic plumage can leave you gasping in admiration. The Common Crow fits neither of these descriptions. His call is harsh, raucous! His feathers are as black as a starless night. His figure is not sleek nor commanding. Ah, but his is the stuff of which legends are made.

"His feathers are as black as a starless night"

In some countries, the crow is considered a bad omen; the bringer of death. In fact, a group of crows is called a "murder" of crows. But in my opinion, it's reputation for being a bad guy is highly exaggerated. I have observed crow couples diligently gathering sticks to add to their nest from the previous year, (or building a new one in the same tree). Crows are doting parents. I have seen them feed greedy, needy chicks, well into the youngster's maturity. The fledglings fly after the parents, begging, from tree-top to roof-top. No dummies, these kids! Crows flock together to attack an enemy. Their raspy call bids others to come feed on the latest carrion find. Yet, they can be seen in solitary flight.

The Corvid is smart. Yes, smart! Now, a bird is no match for the brainpower of a dog; or is it? I read an interesting account of a couple of ravens in Alaska, who ganged up on a sled dog to steal its food. One bird hopped closer and closer to the chained Husky, to tempt it into lunging at it. When the dog leapt forward, the raven retreated to just beyond the poor canine's reach. In an ever widening gap, the bird lured the dog away from the morsel, while the other raven swooped in, grabbed the prize and took off with it. (There is no report on whether the birds "shared" the booty, but you must

admire the ploy.)

Do crows play games for fun? One day when my oldest son was living at home, My husband was out in the garage working on a project with the door open. The car was out in the driveway. Suddenly a crow flew down onto the hood of the car, clumsily slid across the hood, picked itself up and with the air of injured dignity, hopped onto my husband's arm. For the rest of the afternoon, our guest "played" with pencils, bits of shiny metal, and generally entertained our family. It liked the men. I could not entice the crow to land on my arm or sit on my shoulder. My husband and son, however, had acquired a new friend. The crow hung around for a week, until my neighbor decided it should have a name. She called it "Esmeralda". The next day it was gone! Now, did the crow resent the fact that someone tried to give it a name? I prefer to think that it flew back to the person who had initially adopted it and fed it and raised it. I didn't find out and "Esmeralda" never returned.

"Since I was a child, crow watching has been a hobby of mine"

Since I was a child, crow watching has been a hobby of mine. Once I found a young one that had "fallen" out of its nest. My brothers and I fed and protected it and groomed it for the summer day when the pet parade was to be held in town. The morning of the "big day" came and the crow was no where to be found. We called. We searched. No crow. We did not get to the pet parade. A few days later, at the base of an electric pole with a transformer on it, there lay the crow. Crow had been investigating, apparently, the shiny glass insulators and accidentally electrocuted itself. Crows play. Crows entertain. Crows make charming subjects to paint.

As I researched the internet for accurate information, I found a number of interesting sites for Corvid enthusiasts. To seek them for yourself, enter Corvid on your favorite search engine.



Featured Artwork

Ready



"A cautious crow stands on rusting metal on a boat in the bay at Florence, Oregon, U.S.A. It is poised; 'ready' to fly if approached."

Set!



"As if 'set' to fly at an instant's notice, a crow clings to a wrap of wire cable beneath a bridge. He is alert and wary and ready to go."

Go!



"With a blur of its wings and a decided flight path, a crow takes off toward its next destination. Ready, Set, Go!"