

LIVING WITH WILDLIFE

Humane, Effective Solutions to Human-Wildlife Conflicts

A Program of the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals



Crows

In cities, suburbs, and small towns across Massachusetts, people are noticing a change in their neighborhoods. Some think it's good. Some think it's bad. But everybody seems to be talking about it: more wild animals are making their homes in and around people's yards and houses, in parks and playgrounds, in business developments, even right on Main Street.

General Information

The common crow is a large, blue-black bird that can grow to almost two feet long, including the tail feathers. It can be found living in almost every state and is a year-round resident in New England. These highly adaptable animals are commonly identified by their "caw-caw" cry.

Crows live in multiple habitats ranging from farmland to suburban neighborhoods, as long as they can find shelter for roosting and suitable trees for nesting.

Crows are omnivorous and eat grains, insects, carrion, eggs, reptiles, fish, vegetable matter and young birds.

Crows breed in the early spring, and can often be seen carrying building materials such as bark and twigs back to their nests. The nests are lined with soft materials like cloth, feathers and grass. Nests are usually built fifteen or twenty feet high in a tree.

The female lays between four to six eggs, which are then incubated by both the male and female for approximately eighteen days. The young are cared for in the nest for a month before they are ready to leave the nest and feed with the adults. The family unit stays together during the summer and joins other families as the fall approaches.

Possible Conflicts and Solutions

Common problems regarding crows include: noise, and damage to gardens, agricultural crops and trash. Crows are also known to bully other birds at feeders and prey on nestlings belonging to other birds.

If you are experiencing a problem with crows getting into and making a mess of your garbage, know that crows usually feed during the day. If your garbage is being raided at night, you are probably dealing with other animals. If you see crows raiding your garbage, the following are humane solutions:

- Contain all loose garbage and garbage bags.
- Use trash containers with tight-fitting lids.
- Use bungee cords to secure loose lids.
- Store garbage inside between collection days.

- Put garbage out the morning of the day of collection, rather than the night before.

If you are experiencing a problem with crows gathering in your yard, the following are humane solutions:

- Use noisemakers and distress calls.
- Install a motion sensor on your garden hose.
- Affix scarecrows and mylar balloons throughout your yard.
- Trim and thin roost trees *before* the roosting season.

Public Health Concerns

The most important public health concern associated with crows is the accumulation of fecal droppings at roosts. Histoplasmosis spores can be inhaled at roosting sites of birds and bats. There are five forms of histoplasmosis that are clinically recognizable, ranging from a mild hypersensitivity to a disease that mimics chronic pulmonary tuberculosis. Children are especially susceptible to the disease and if contact is suspected they should seek immediate medical care.

For more information about humanely solving human-wildlife conflicts or about the MSPCA's Living With Wildlife program, call (617) 522-7400, visit www.LivingWithWildlife.org, or email LivingWithWildlife@mspca.org.