

Common Raven Nesting in Eastern Ontario

by

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In Ontario, the Common Raven (*Corvus corax*), is considered a common permanent resident throughout the province, but rare south of Algonquin Provincial Park (James *et al.* 1976). Its status in the Ottawa District has changed considerably over the past decades. In 1911, the Common Raven was found to be a rare resident, becoming common on the Quebec side of the Ottawa District. In the immediate vicinity of Ottawa it was a rare winter visitor (Eifrig 1911). H. Lloyd described this species as a "rare resident" in the Ottawa District, "formerly occurring in the city" (Lloyd 1944). In 1969, Pittaway referred to the Common Raven as a "scarce resident in [the] Gatineau; breeds. Very rare elsewhere" (Pittaway 1969). Since then, the number of Common Raven sightings has increased on the Ontario side of the Ottawa District, primarily in the townships of West Carleton and Kanata. During the mid-1970s most of the observations were made during the winter months, but by the late 1970s sightings of Common Ravens were reported all year round. In the

1980s, the winter population ranged from 10 to 40 birds, with most found at the Torbolton Township Dump, and a few remaining into the summer (B. M. D.).

In June 1984 the first possible breeding evidence in the Ottawa District was found. An adult raven and two young were observed in a heavily wooded area consisting of eastern white cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*) and white pine (*Pinus strobus*) at the south end of Constance Lake, March Township (B. M. D.).

During the five years of the *Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas* project (1981-85), no confirmation of nesting was found in the Ottawa District or anywhere east of Ottawa (Blomme 1987). It was not until 1987 that the first documented nesting of Common Raven was established in the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton. Surprisingly, this nest site occurred east of Ottawa, rather than to the west where it was expected.

Since the early 1980s two or three Common Ravens have been regularly observed around the

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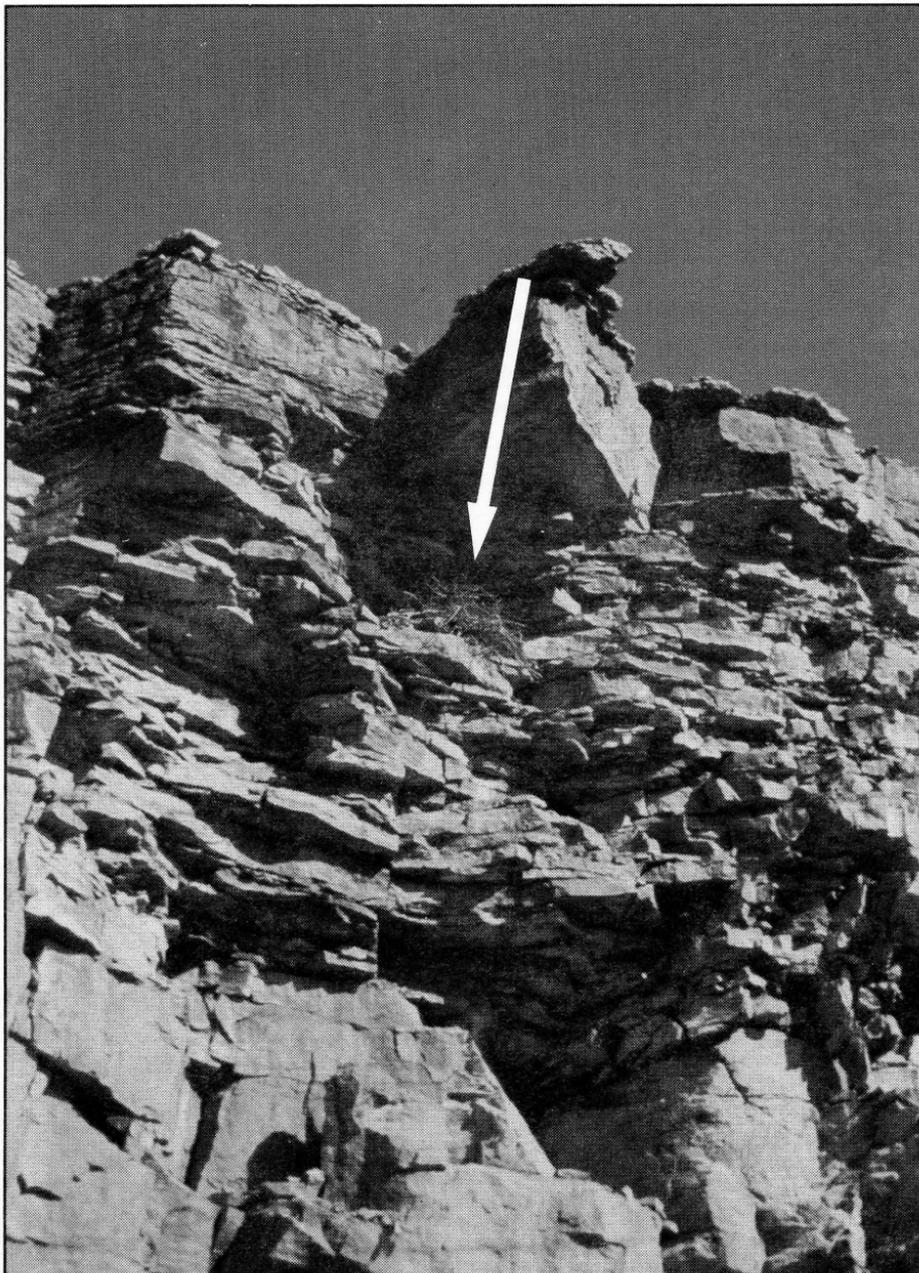


Figure 1: Common Raven nest (arrow), Francon Gravel Pits, Gloucester, Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton, Ontario, April 1987. Photo by Bruce M. Di Labio.

Green's Creek Sewage Lagoon, east of Ottawa. Breeding was first suspected in May 1986, when a large abandoned nest was found at the Francon Gravel Pits along the north end of Bearbrook Road, near Blackburn Hamlet, Gloucester Township.

The gravel pit was monitored the following year, beginning in February. After numerous visits, a Common Raven was finally observed on 17 March. By 4 April two Common Ravens were present, with a large nest in the final stages of completion. From 5 April on, Common Ravens were observed sharing the incubation duties. Due to the remoteness of the nesting site, the authors were unable to view inside the nest, making the exact hatching date impossible to confirm. The nesting of the Common Ravens was later confirmed on 20 April when at least two and possibly three young were observed sticking their heads above the walls of the nest. They left the nest on 15 May, and were later seen less than 1 km away from the nesting site on 28 May.

The nest site was located on the side of the gravel pit wall, approximately 20 to 25 m above the floor of the quarry, and 3 m from the top. The nest was situated in a crevice with a large overhanging rock protecting the nest from weather and disturbance (Fig. 1). It is interesting to note that the nest site was at one of the highest elevations in Ontario east of Ottawa. The nest was situated on

the south-facing wall of the pit and was constructed mainly of large sticks. Due to the inaccessibility of the nest, a complete description of the nest materials was impossible.

The Common Raven is normally wary of humans; however in some circumstances they prove to adapt well when suitable man-made habitat is present (Blomme 1987). This proved to be the case with this nesting, since the gravel pit where the nest was located was active, with heavy machinery and dynamite activity present. This demonstrates the adaptability of Common Ravens in the selection of nest sites when there is a lack of natural nesting habitat.

This record represents an eastern extension of the breeding range of the Common Raven in Ontario. It is also the first documented breeding record of the Common Raven in the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton.

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