

Note

Wing-tail Flicking as a Means of Distinguishing Crows from Ravens

Visitors to Haliburton County often ask me how to tell a Common Raven (*Corvus corax*) from an American Crow (*C. brachyrhynchos*). The field guides cover the differences, but experience with the two is necessary before most observers feel comfortable distinguishing them, particularly where their ranges overlap.

In the summer of 1985, while watching crows near my home in Minden, Haliburton County, Ontario, I noted a distinctive behaviour of crows which I later observed is not exhibited by ravens. This behavioural characteristic is a very useful criterion for identification.

Crows habitually flick their folded wings and fan their tails, especially just after perching, when this flicking is usually done one to three times. Kilham (1985a, 1985b) called this behaviour "wing-tail flicking." He reported that it was performed during most territorial encounters between crows. My observations of hundreds of crows over a three year period indicate that "wing-tail flicking" is a characteristic behaviour of crows that is given throughout the year, often without apparent territorial significance. While I observed large

numbers of ravens during the same period, I observed no "wing-tail flicking" from them. R. Tozer (pers. comm., 1988) watched ravens and crows over the same period in Algonquin Provincial Park, Nipissing District, and did not observe "wing-tail flicking."

The presence of "wing-tail flicking" is particularly useful in separating crows from ravens that are perched at a distance when size and shape are difficult to judge. Often only the wing flicking is noticeable because of distance or angle of view. The absence of flicking is not diagnostic of ravens, but since crows do it frequently, its absence is a clue to the species' identity.

Practice watching for "wing-tail flicking" in crows. It is usually given one to three times immediately after landing. Next time you are in an area where crows and ravens occur together, you will have developed another useful technique for distinguishing the two species.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Ron Tozer for field testing "wing-tail flicking" and for his literature suggestions and helpful comments in the preparation of this note.

Literature Cited

Kilham, L. 1985a. Territorial behavior of American Crows. *Wilson Bulletin* 97:389-390.

Kilham, L. 1985b. Behavior of American Crows in the early part of the breeding cycle. *Florida Field Naturalist* 13:25-31.

Ron Pittaway, Box 619, Minden, Ontario K0M 2K0

Book Reviews

Ornithology in Laboratory and Field (5th edition). 1985. By Olin Sewall Pettingill, Jr. Academic Press, Orlando, Florida. xi + 403 pp., illus. \$32.40 (U.S.).

This volume, which is intended primarily as both a laboratory manual and a textbook for a college course in ornithology, has had a long and distinguished history from its first published version in 1939. The fourth edition, published in 1970, was widely adopted by universities and colleges throughout North America; however, it was starting to become dated. Fortunately, this new and thoroughly updated edition is now available, and Pettingill's book seems destined to maintain its unique place in the ornithological literature.

The basic outline of the book has changed little from the fourth edition, except for the inclusion of a brief chapter entitled "Flight." There are 22 chapters covering topics ranging from anatomy and physiology through behaviour, ecology, and identification in the laboratory and field. The book is generally strong in its coverage of anatomy, especially external characteristics used in classifying birds, and weak in its coverage of ecology. This is a deliberate plan, understandable in view of the book's main intended audience, and Pettingill makes no

pretence that it is a complete textbook of ornithology. However, every chapter concludes with a detailed and well-chosen list of references, and one of the book's strongest points is its value as an introduction to ornithological literature for the beginning student. Several chapters include specific suggestions for student projects, and every effort is made to encourage the reader to undertake independent studies on birds.

The thoroughness and authority which characterize all of Pettingill's books are once again apparent here. Sidney Gauthreaux, Jr., who wrote the chapter on migration, and Jack Hailman, who wrote the chapter on behaviour, are acknowledged by Pettingill, as are several others who reviewed or contributed to specific chapters. However, Pettingill himself deserves most of the credit for the success which *Ornithology in Laboratory and Field* has enjoyed and should continue to enjoy.

One major disappointment in this new edition is the elimination of several of the extremely useful appendices found in the fourth edi-