

Jackdaws reach the New World

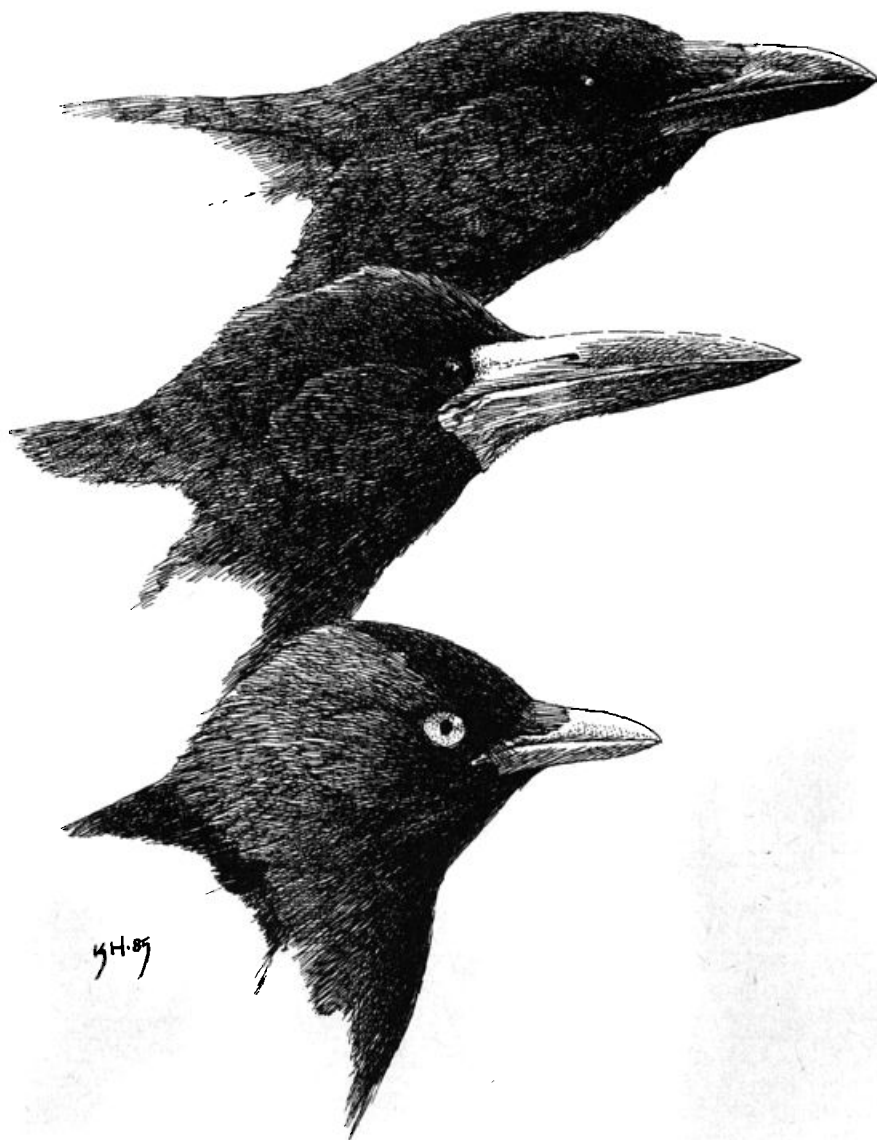
*The first specimen record for North America
with notes concerning the birds' probable origin*

P. William Smith

SOMETIME IN EARLY March of April, 1984, Christopher Blane, a young resident of Block Island, Rhode Island, realized that while he was hunting crows on local agricultural land he had shot a small corvid with a gray nape. He was intrigued with the bird and took it to the island's formidable ornithologist, Merrill Slate. Slate, after consulting various bird books, felt that the bird was most certainly a [Eurasian] Jackdaw, *Corvus monedula*. He froze the specimen awaiting corroboration, but without noting the date. On May 5, 1984, Elise Lapham, a birder and bird bander of long experience, arrived on Block Island and was shown the specimen soon thereafter. She was told that the specimen was about a month old. She, too, was of the opinion that the bird was a Jackdaw. The bird was taken from the island by Richard Bowen and the specimen was eventually acquired by Duncan Evered and P. W. Smith (the author), both of whom confirmed it as *Corvus monedula*.

The specimen was prepared as a study skin by M. McClellan through the courtesy of the Massachusetts Audubon Society. After thawing, this male Jackdaw (testes approximately 3 × 5 mm), weighed 250.5 g. Its wing chord measured 235 mm. It did have some subcutaneous fat. The study skin measured 336 mm (tail 140 mm, flattened wing 228 mm); the tarsal length was 44 mm, and the culmen 24.3 mm, from nostril to tip. The specimen is now in the bird collection of the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University as Number 331,728.

When compared with an extensive study skin series at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, the Block Island Jackdaw's dark tone,



The relative size of three corvids is readily apparent in this drawing. Top to bottom: Carrion Crow (Corvus corone), Rook (Corvus frugilegus), and Jackdaw (Corvus monedula). More agile and less cautious than the Rook or Carrion Crow, the Jackdaw is often the more successful scavenger. Drawing/Keith Hansen.

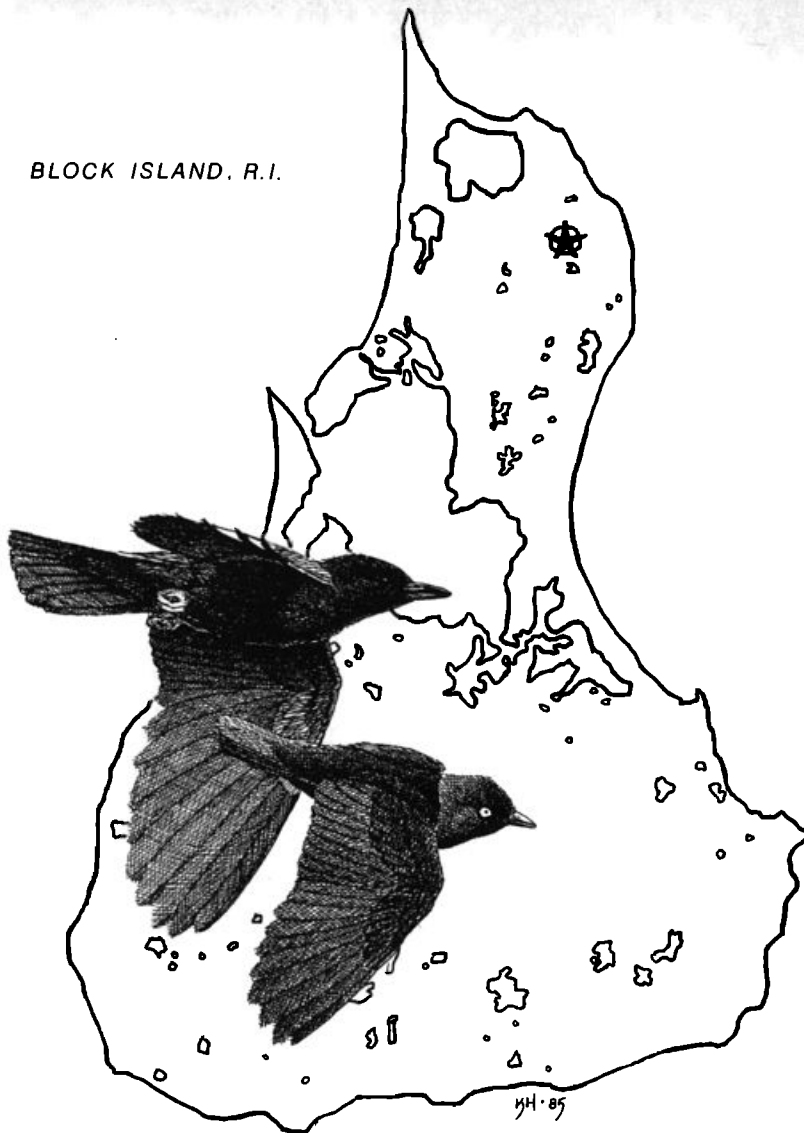
lacking any hint of white on the feathers of the sides of the lower neck, indicated that this individual was of the West European race, *Corvus monedula spermologus*. Its mainly dull brown greater wing coverts and secondaries, only a few feathers of which showed metallic green or purple, indicated that this bird was in its first alternate plumage while retaining some juvenal feathers (based on Svensson, 1984).

In the spring and summer of 1984 there were records of nine Jackdaws occurring on coastal islands in northeastern North America (Table 1, Fig. 1). The first individual reported was present on Nantucket Island, Massachusetts, from December 31, 1983 on, and was probably present from at least November 28, 1982 (S. Perkins and R. Stymeist, *pers. comm.*). None of the other eight sightings, including the Block Island specimen discussed here, was found before late March, 1984. One of those found on Miquelon Island, France (overseas) on March 23, appeared exhausted, suggesting a recent long-distance flight (A. Desbrosse and R. Etcheberry, *ms*). Additional evidence supporting the long distance theory was the fact that that bird was picked up and handled by a child.

THE ROYAL METEOROLOGICAL Society *Weather Log* for March, 1984, showed that an intense low pressure system formed near Iceland about March 18, and subsequently blanketed the North Atlantic for several days (in *Weather* 39:5 [1984]). Elkins (1983), discussed how easterly winds between low pressure systems (such as these) and high pressure areas extending south from the North Pole are directed from northern Europe toward Iceland, southern Greenland, eastern Canada, and the northeastern United States. This occurs most frequently between late autumn and early spring. Bagg (1967) explained how these conditions can cause east-west trans-Atlantic displacement when they occur in conjunction with birds' normal movements in Europe. Bagg used east-west displacement of Northern Lapwings, *Vanellus vanellus*, as a typical example.

Jackdaws in Europe have become increasingly numerous in modern times. They have spread northwest into Scotland, first breeding there during this century (Parslow, 1967). Many from the Eurasian interior and Scandinavia migrate west in order to winter in the milder climate of coastal Europe (Busse, 1969).

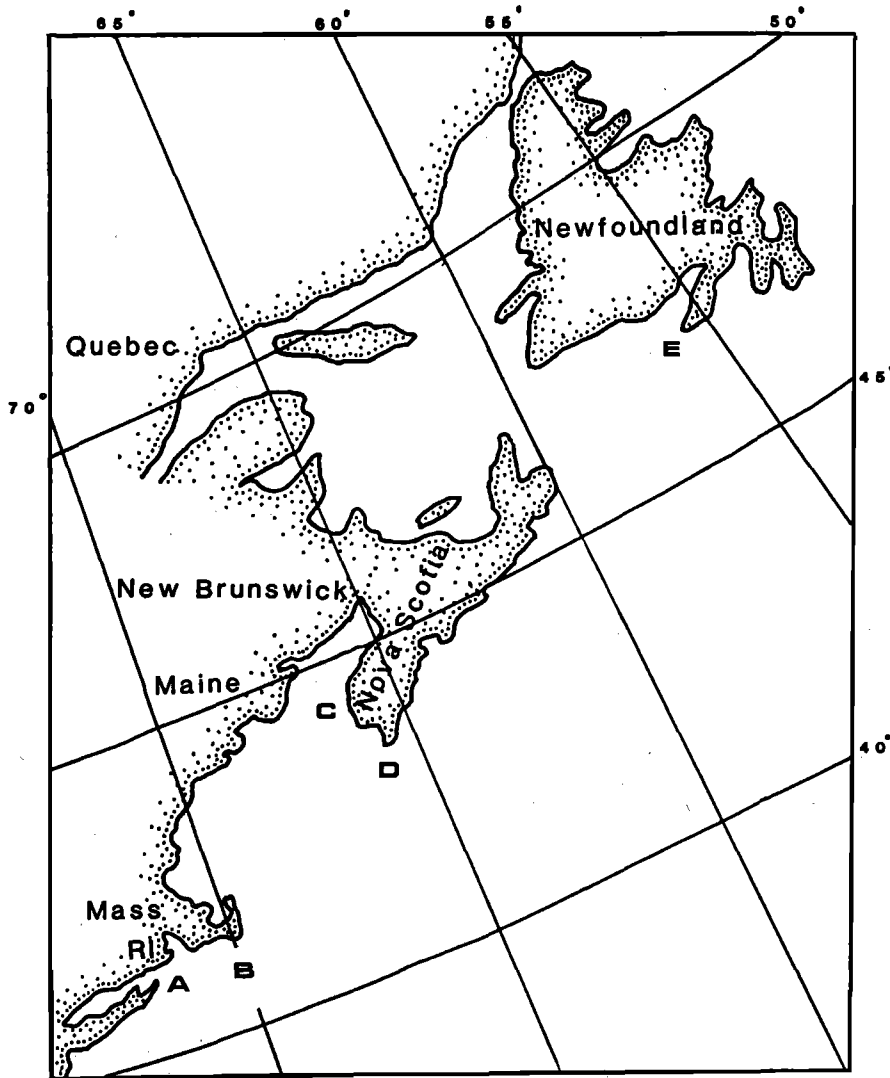
BLOCK ISLAND. R.I.



A Common Crow, *Corvus brachyrhynchos* (top), and a Jackdaw fly over Block Island. The asterisk in the upper-right-hand corner of the map indicates where the first North American Jackdaw specimen to reach our shores was collected. Drawing/Keith Hansen.

Movements through Germany peak during a short period in mid-to-late October and flocks often include other corvids, *i.e.*, Rooks, *Corvus frugilegus* (Waterhouse, 1949). Flocks of Jackdaws arrive in Britain in late October and disperse to winter in agricultural areas (Bannerman & Lodge, 1953). In autumn 1983, there was an especially large and out-of-place assemblage of thousands on the Isles of Scilly, off the southwest coast of Britain, on October 23-24 (*Brit. Birds* 77:40 [1984]). Continental Jackdaws begin to form migratory flocks in late February and have mostly departed Britain by late April (Bannerman & Lodge, 1953). Waterhouse (1949) found that the peak of the return flight through central Germany occurs in late March.

In recent years, migrating Jackdaws have been noted after being displaced over the North Atlantic. October 18, 1975, a flock of 20 reached the British weathership on Ocean Station Lima at 57°N, 20°W, approximately 400 miles south of Iceland (*Sea Swallow* 26:18 [1977]). In late October and early November, 1976, 42 Jackdaws, three Rooks, and three Carrion Crows, *Corvus corone*, were reported from two commercial ships 140 to 200 miles southwest of Ireland (*Sea Swallow* 27:26 [1978]). In the same autumns there were major influxes of Jackdaws into Iceland (Nielsen 1979). At least 58 were recorded there in those years; the only previous incursion of any magnitude had involved about 20 individuals in autumn 1952. European



North American locations of Jackdaws reported during 1984 through October 1: (A) Block Island, Rhode Island: 41°10' N, 71°35' W (B) Nantucket Island, Massachusetts: 41°15' N, 70°00' W (C) Brier Island, Nova Scotia: 44°15' N, 66°20' W (D) Bon Portage Island, Nova Scotia: 43°30' N, 65°45' W (E) Miquelon Island, France (overseas): 47°05' N, 56°25' W.

Table 1. Jackdaws Reported in North America During 1984 Through 1 October.

Bird #	Map Location	Dates	Authority and Notes
1	Siasconset, Nantucket I., MA (B)	From December 31, 1983	<i>Bird Obs. East. Mass.</i> 12:102 (1984). Probably the same individual present in same location November 28, 1982–April 4, 1983.
2–4	Miquelon I., French Overseas Dept. (E)	March 23–April 6 and from July 18, 1984	A. Desbrosse and R. Etcheberry (<i>ms.</i>). Birds found July 18 were presumed to be the same as those seen earlier. <i>cf. Am. Birds</i> 38:886 [1984].
5	Block I., RI (A)	Early April, 1984	Specimen to MCZ (this paper).
6	Brier I., Nova Scotia (C)	May 6, 1984	<i>Nova Scotia Birds</i> 26[3]:16 (1984). Published photo.
7	Bon Portage I., Nova Scotia (D)	May 20–24, 1984	McLaren, I. A. (1985). <i>Nova Scotia Birds</i> 27[1]:56.
8	Siasconset, Nantucket I., MA (B)	From July 9, 1984	<i>Bird Obs. East. Mass.</i> 12:294 (1984). Another individual seen with No. 1 above; possibly present earlier.
9	Miquelon I., French Overseas Dept. (E)	From July 18, 1984	A fourth individual found when Nos. 2–4 were rediscovered (Desbrosse and Etcheberry, <i>ms.</i>).

weather systems in October, 1975, were particularly conducive to east-to-west bird movement and resulted in the displacement of many other species (Baker 1977).

Between 1950 and 1979, Jackdaws arrived in Iceland in about as many springs as autumns (30%), primarily from March to early May (Nielsen 1979). The greatest number in a single spring appeared in 1972, when six individuals were found. One of those (Icelandic Museum of Natural History Number RM 5957), shot in March, was an adult female of the race *spermologus*. Individuals from the 1975 and 1976 autumn incursions remained in Iceland over the summer of 1977, built two nests, but did not lay eggs. As of the early 1980s, the species had not successfully colonized Iceland.

THE STATUS OF THE Jackdaw in North America was uncertain before the 1984 appearances. There is a published account of one photographed at Ft Myers, Florida, in the winter of 1962–1963, which was thought to have been an escaped cagebird (*Aud. Field Notes* 17:322 [1963]). The origin of one widely observed on Nantucket Island in the winter of 1982–1983 was also questioned (*Bird Obs. East. Mass.* 11:49 [1983]), and its habits and movements were not systematically followed (Table 1). However its discovery in late November, 1982, did in fact coincide with the appearance of four individuals in Iceland during that month (*Bliki* 3:41–42 [1984]). It was the first influx of Jackdaws in Iceland in autumn since 1976, other than a single individual in 1978. There is also an anecdotal report of this species appearance earlier in Nova Scotia, probably in spring 1983 (I. McLaren, *in litt.*).

According to T. P. Inskipp of the British Wildlife Trade Management Unit (*pers. comm.*), countries in Western Europe have not allowed commercial trade in their native wild avifauna for many years. Because of various wildlife laws, *e.g.* the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), signed by both the United States and Canada in 1975, bird importation into North America is now closely monitored and regulated and penalties for non-compliance are severe (Fuller, 1983). While personally-owned or captive-bred Jackdaws, or ones obtained for *bona fide* scientific purposes, might be brought into the United States legally, there are no records of any Jackdaws being imported



The feathers of the cheek, neck and nape are a light or silvery gray and form a distinctive collar against the darker slate gray of the back and the grayish blue-black of the rest of the body. In defensive as well as sexual displays, the Jackdaw erects the headfeathers of the nape and back of the neck.

Drawing/Keith Hansen.

from 1968 through 1974, when such data were published by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. The only captive North American Jackdaws listed in the June 1984 International Species Inventory System (ISIS) Avian Taxonomic Species Distribution Report are two over 17-years-of-age in the San Diego, California, Zoo (*vide* M. Schofield). According to H. W. Ritchie, of the U. S. Department of Agriculture (*pers. comm.*), the expense and bother of complying with quarantine regulations initiated in 1981 regarding personally-owned birds, coupled with increased vigilance by customs officers, have recently reduced both legal and illegal importation of pets. The author can find no evidence suggesting that there might have been more than a few Jackdaws held or raised in captivity in North America in recent times.

Summarily, Jackdaws have an expanding population and a modern history of weather-related displacement over the North Atlantic. The appearance of several along the North American Atlantic seaboard in spring 1984, including the first specimen record cited here, coincided with appropriate weather conditions for trans-Atlantic vagrancy and the peak of the species' spring migration in Western Europe following a heavy fall irruption. No evidence suggests that these birds were other than natural vagrants.

In addition to those already named, I wish to thank the many people who assisted in the preparation of this note including Richard Forster, Amy Knowlton, Raymond Paynter, and Aevan Petersen. Thanks to the American Museum of Natural History for access and extensive use of their collection, and especially to Stu-

art Keith, who helped confirm subspecific identification of the specimen. Trevor Lloyd-Evans confirmed its probable age and critically reviewed an earlier draft of this note, offering several helpful suggestions.

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