

Birds Can Be Smarter Than You Think

By Adam Trujillo

Often when we admire a bird, it's for its beautiful feathers or stunning song. Northern Cardinals are beloved for their distinctive red feathers and Red-winged Blackbirds are known for their songs. I know those birds got me excited the first time I encountered them.

But what about a crow or a raven? These birds have feathers that are entirely black and a song that often, and annoyingly, wakes people up from a nice sleep. But there is more to these birds than we give them credit for.

Even though corvids don't always have the brightest feathers or the nicest song, they have something that a lot of other birds don't have: high intelligence. In fact, the birds in the corvid family, including the Raven, the Jays, Magpies, Nutcrackers, and others, are known to be far more intelligent than most other birds. Now when I say intelligent, I don't mean that any of them hold a college degree or work for NASA. But for a bird, they have a lot of smarts. A bird can actually be one smart creature. Here is what I mean.

Ravens have been known to ignore the sound of a car door closing, but fly towards the sound of a gunshot because they know it will mean food. They have also been known to use sticks as make-shift tools to go after certain prey, bending the stick in a certain way to use it as a scoop or a way to pry open a bit of wood.

A raven may also remember where a kill was left of few days earlier and return to it. In lab studies, ravens were able to solve basic problems, remember patterns, and even be able to remember certain lab technicians and how they were treated by them. Studies concluded that ravens are able to express intelligence comparable to that of a dolphin or even a seven-year-old child. By that logic, a raven should have no issues in the second grade, the third grade is a discussion for a different day. But for a bird to be able to express any intelligence comparable a young any child is a remarkable feat!

Intelligence in birds isn't just limited to the corvids. If we look at our parakeets and parrots, they show cleverness as well by being able to speak, a feat also accomplished by some corvids in lab studies. While the parrots and parakeets may not possess the same amount of intelligence as the corvids do, being able to hear, process, learn, and reply to words takes a lot of brain power. Mix that combination of acumen and beautiful feathers and you have a male parrot who will make any female swoon!

While we humans tend to appreciate the outside feathers and song of birds, we should consider their brains along with their beauty. Corvids and other intelligent birds are marvels of the animal world, so if you are ever called a "bird brain" in an argument, take it as a compliment!

Photo by Jack Bulmer: One of the most common corvids in America is the American Crow.