

(Jeff Lemmons)



Corvidae the JAYS, CROWS, and RAVENS

Ornithologists have identified 125 species of crows, jays, ravens, magpies, jackdaws, and related birds, and they have classified them together in a group commonly called the “Corvids.” These birds are cosmopolitan in distribution with a total of 20 species known in North America. Four Corvids have been documented in the Carolinas, and all four of these have been found breeding in the Carolina Piedmont.

Throughout our history, Corvids have been part of the folklore of the Carolinas. Ravens and crows featured prominently in the stories of the Cherokee and other American Indian tribes. In the nineteenth century, some Carolinians believed the sighting of a raven to be bad omen, or the presence of a crow to bring bad luck, or even that a crow seen not flapping in flight could make a wish come true. Corvids were also widely admired for their keen, almost human-like intelligence and many considered these birds to be “clever rogues.”

Sadly, these fascinating birds were widely persecuted here as well. Crows, jays, and ravens have been hunted as pests and targeted for sport. They were considered to be destructive to farms and livestock, and they were known to be serious predators of other bird’s nests. Corvids were excluded from early bird protection laws, and crows are still legally hunted today.

“The only thing that has taken place to break the monotony of winter in our section was a ‘crow hunt’... This fascinating event took place on Monday night of last week. About 40 or more of our male citizens, both young and old, met at the home of Mr. Calvin Haynes and organized for war upon the kaw-kawing blacks... the battle which raged fiercely for one and a half hours resulting in the killing of some 30 crows, and a joyous return of the volunteer hunters to their several homes.” —*Lincoln County News*, March 3, 1908