

Indian House Crow in Charleston County, S.C.: Second Sighting for North America

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On 6 October 1984, Nugent saw an Indian House Crow (*Corvus splendens*) in a shopping center at Mt. Pleasant, Charleston County, S.C. (Nugent, 1984). Through a 20-40 X telescope, Nugent and four others watched the crow for 5 min. The published description (op. cit.) states that it was "a medium-sized crow with a large bill. Its face was black to the point just beyond the eye. The back of the head, neck and upper breast were grayish brown and the back, wings and tail were black.

This individual was identical to one that Nugent and others had seen in September 1974, at the Pitt Street Causeway, Mt. Pleasant. Just before that sighting, Elliott, who is a harbor pilot, brought a ship into Charleston Harbor that had a crow from India on board. According to crew members, who had been feeding the crow, two crows landed on the ship when it was several km off India. One crow was lost in a storm, but the other remained on board until the ship approached Charleston. Elliott watched it fly towards Sullivan's Island.

On 10 December 1985, at 1610, Post saw the same or another individual of this species in front of a Church's Fried Chicken shop in Charleston, next to the Cooper River Bridge. The bird was perched above the street on a light pole. It was silhouetted against the sky, so color patterns were not apparent, but the heavy beak was different from that of the Fish Crow (*C. ossifragus*). The crow flew in the direction of Drum Island. Post was able to see the lighter (grayish) color of the nape and breast region. The bird called, giving a low-pitched *uuhr-uuhr-uuhr*, which was quite different from any Fish Crow vocalization that he had heard.

On 11 December 1985 Post searched for the crow again in the late afternoon, and found it perched on the roof of a Piggly Wiggly supermarket across the street from the 10 December location. It competed for food scraps with Fish Crows, and twice supplanted the latter species. The bird could not be found during subsequent December searches.

On 29 October 1986, at 1430, Post saw an Indian House Crow perched on power lines in front of the Moultrie Middle School gymnasium in Mt. Pleasant. It flew down and foraged along the sidewalk, approaching within 10 m of a student sitting on the steps of the gymnasium. On 2 November 1986, at 1345, Post and Kathleen W. Post were able to get good views of an Indian House Crow as it sat on a power line in front of Burger King in Mt. Pleasant. The bird has not been reported since this sighting.

The questions about this bird are: is the 1974 bird the same one that was seen in 1984-1986, and is there only one bird? It is possible that the same bird lasted the 12 years, as other species of Corvidae are known to be long-lived. For example, the Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*) has been reported living 18 years, 4 months (Clapp, et al., 1983). It is also likely that only one individual is involved, as the species usually associates as pairs or in family groups (Goodwin, 1976) and the bird did not associate with Fish Crows.

That this crow is tame, and frequents the edges of human habitation, where food is available, agrees well with descriptions of its behavior from other parts of its range (Goodwin, 1976).

The bird reported here appears to be the second for North America. The first report was one seen on 19 June 1971 at Brigantine National Wildlife Refuge, by F.B. Gill and B.G. Murray, Jr., (Gill, 1985).

The Indian House Crow is known to hitch-hike on vessels, and has been purposefully introduced or self-introduced to Malaya, Sudan, South Africa, the East African coastal strip, Aden, Egypt, western Australia, Mauritius and elsewhere (see review by Long, 1981). The species is an agricultural pest and disease vector, and it is believed to have decimated a number of native bird species (Ryall and Reid, 1987). Several government agencies are now attempting to eradicate these introduced populations. Observers on the east coast of North America, particularly around port cities, should be alert for this crow. Its arrival and establishment in North America would have profound ecological consequences.

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