

## Wild Things: Urban Crows

BY MARGARET BAIRD

Long cast as mythical harbingers of death and misfortune—not to mention cartoonish corn crop thieves—crows have been given undeserved short shrift by humans. We say: Nevermore! (OK, that's a raven thing. But still.)

Unfortunately, as much as we'd love for everyone to appreciate these resourceful and clever corvids, there are plenty of folks who hear *caw caw* and see red—mainly due to the early hour. Those who happen to live near a winter roost site of crows may get a regular unwelcome wake-up call around 5 a.m.

As the leap in their population numbers over the past few decades shows, crows have learned to thrive among us. In fact, you're probably familiar with an impressive avian spectacle that plays out every winter evening in cities and towns all across America: As we commute home to

plaints from cranky human neighbors, and you may be on the receiving end of many of those calls. In urban and suburban areas, crow complainers focus on messiness and the noise around roosts. Poop on the walkways and vehicles beneath roosts is an aggravation, as are the crows' loud vocalizations, which tend to be worst immediately before dawn. Foraging crows may also help themselves to loose trash or ripening garden produce.

A combination of humane harassment techniques can get crows to vamoose from their roosts, but the techniques require a dedicated effort. Residents should be vigilant and start just as roosts are beginning to form for the season, before the birds really settle in. Altering the roost by trimming trees and reducing outdoor lighting (including turning off lights where possible, aiming lights downward, or installing ground-level motion triggers)



JOHN HADDJIAN/THE HSUS

the 'burbs at sunset, thousands of crows stream above us in the opposite direction, flapping toward urban roosts for some shut-eye after a long day of foraging in the country. We don't know for sure why crows have taken such a liking to urban real estate, but possible reasons include the warmth radiating from pavements and buildings; bright lights illuminating predators like owls; and protection from potshots in rural areas by Farmer Brown and company.

Not surprisingly, lots of crows gathering in one place often equals lots of com-

can make the location far less attractive to these birdbrains. Playing recordings of crow distress calls has also demonstrated success. Setting off pyrotechnics is another effective dispersal strategy, but—buzz kill!—only when performed by trained personnel where legally permitted. Ditto for bird-specific lasers and fogging with bird repellents. Crows usually won't move very far, but allowing them to occupy an acceptable alternative location nearby—as the crow flies, that is—is often the best compromise. AS

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