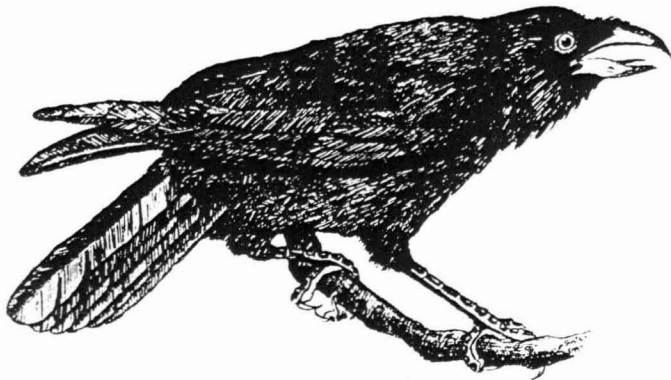


OPINIONS



Dear Editor, *AFA Watchbird*,

In the March/April issue of the *Watchbird*, I was pleased to see an article about some Common Ravens.

At the end of the article are some italicized statements where it is stated that ravens can be aggressive, unpredictable, and destructive, and "therefore do not make good pets. Keeping or breeding ravens is illegal."

While I understand why these statements were made, I have some observations I would like to share with you and your readers...

Certainly we are all well aware that many psittacines, legal-to-keep softbills, and legal-to-keep native raptors are also aggressive, unpredictable, and destructive. I submit to your readers that ravens make no worse "pets" than any other independent highly intelligent bird that is zero to three generations removed from the "wild."

There are many different types of non-native corvids (crow family birds) available for US aviculture, whether as importable birds which can serve as breeding pairs, or as the captive bred offspring of pairs already here.

The African Pied Crow, *Corvus albus*, for example, is very similar to our own native crows and ravens. There are many other types.

I submit to you and your readers that there is an increased need to begin breeding the non-native corvids and other softbills while they are still legal to import.

I am also interested in seeing the

native corvids introduced into American aviculture in a similar manner as the native "game" birds are. And, also of note, native raptors are legal to breed and keep, for falconry.

In my view, only a limited number of birds from the wild would be required to begin a successful captive breeding program for the native corvids. These takings could be monitored and limited by the U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service. The Service could impose banding schemes on such birds, similar to how they do for the native "game" birds and native raptors, to ensure that only captive bred offspring are sold. There does need to be sufficient interest from us though, to push this issue forward.

In any case, there are many non-native corvid species available, for import, for breeding, and on a smaller scale, as pets.

May I share with you and your readers a few of the web sites I recommend people visit to learn more about this issue:

My own pages:

<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Atrium/1424/>

The Softbills.com web site:

<http://www.softbills.com/>

A site that profiles some native corvids, to give you an idea of what the non-native ones would be like for you:

<http://www.shades-ofnight.com/aviary/>

A softbills discussion group (with a purview which includes corvids):
http://www.onelist.com/subscribe.cgi/SOFTBILLED_BIRDS

I am very much a "newbie" to corvid aviculture myself. I am currently working on being able to breed some non-native ones, and I would like to become a licensed rehabilitator of the native ones. I don't claim to be an expert, but I do have a strong impression that many aviculturists don't realize there are highly intriguing crows, ravens, magpies, and jays legally available for US aviculture – birds vary similar to native-to-the-US corvids.

I strongly and independently urge all softbill and corvid breeders and keepers to consider writing articles and letters to the *Watchbird*, so as to further educate the avicultural community about softbill and corvid aviculture.

Sincerely

Jonathan Higbee

AFA Life Member

My Dear Higbee

Very good letter. You address some excellent points. Of course I put the disclaimer in the raven article to inform our readers that it is illegal to go into the field and gather baby corvids. The ravens in the article were in a licensed rehab facility but some our readers may not have taken note of that.

*I am myself a very great fan of the corvids. I commend you for asking for more corvid articles in the *Watchbird*. I should very much like to see more of them.*

Indeed, my Dear Higbee, the first answer to your request is Associate Editor Carolyn Swicegood's Blue Jay article in this very issue – a wonderful story of her experience with a Corvid – a charming Blue Jay.

I suggest you produce the next article – corvid of your choice. I shall follow with my own corvid article (and I have some good tales to tell). Perhaps, we can get the ball rolling.

Many thanks for your letter.

Sheldon Dingle, editor 