

Life With a Pied Crow

by Robert J. Rush
Glen Rock, New Jersey

Why is that crow wearing a white vest? Looks like a crow dressed for a formal night on the town. No, birds don't conform to our ideals of what constitutes being well dressed. This bird is an African Pied Crow (*Corvus albus*), an Old World cousin of our familiar Crows (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) and the not so common Northern Raven (*Corvus corax*).

As the common name indicates, this corvid originates in the continent of Africa where it is found somewhat abundantly south of the Sahara. In body size this bird is comparable to *C. brachyrhynchos* with a head shaped more like *C. corax* to which it is closer allied. As with most *Corvus* species, the plumage is primarily black (although highly glossed reflecting subtle tones of purplish blue) with a black bill and

legs. Unlike most species, the chest and upper abdomen are covered in the purist of snow white feathers, terminating in a band forming a semi-circle round the lower nape – a site that must truly be seen, to be appreciated.

So why a Pied Crow anyway? Well, I'm going to tell you why – I'm going to tell you about my Pied Crow, Aristotle, who came to live with me nearly three years ago. It all started with an email to Rick Jordan of Hill Country Aviaries, in Texas who at the time had two young birds that were being handfed. After about two dozen correspondences and three months of waiting (ran into the old summer sizzle and the airlines wouldn't ship for three weeks) the young bird arrived at my door, well, almost, I had to pick up from the airport and absorb a three hour delay caused by a connecting flight.

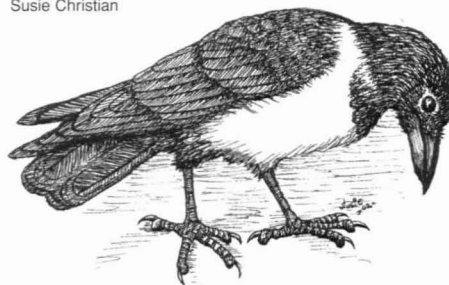
But I still remember my amazement as I drove home, opening the little door to the carrier and seeing that big red mouth pop out, uttering a long whining hunger cry. As I had come prepared, I removed a few pieces of presoaked dog chow and quickly satiated the crying void.

Once home, Aristotle quickly

settled into the large cage that I had provided and was offered any and all items that could amuse and entertain, and of course quickly became spoiled rotten. I soon discovered that it was a never ending battle to keep this bundle of energy entertained, starting with the traditional (and expensive) dog, cat, and bird toys, rapidly transitioning to cardboard boxes, paper towels, rubber aquarium hose, towels, rags, and anything non-toxic that could be procured from the local 5&10 store.

Crows, unlike most parrots, make the most unbelievable mess – not just the ordinary five minute dustpan and broom mess, but rather I leave for work then come home

Line drawing by
Susie Christian



ready to dial 911 because my-house-has-just-been-robbed or a hurricane-has-just-struck, mess. Feed Aristotle blueberries – the walls and floors are wearing blueberries, feed Aristotle mynah pellets – mynah pellets are hurled halfway down the hallway, feed Aristotle mealworms – well you get the picture.

Aristotle is somewhat of a large crow with a very aggressive personality, and everyone including the breeder and myself thought she was a he. Well, it turns out that she was not a he, but rather a her. Aristotle is quite headstrong and fearless, and although she does not talk, she is very assertive in getting her point across. When attention is on the menu, she will call endlessly till she is liberated from her captivity, and this is equally true of being uncovered in the morning – try sleeping in on weekends, I dare you!

At this point, it must appear that a Pied Crow in the house is somewhat of a liability – I'm an

Photos by Robert J. Rush



Aristotle contemplating mischief.



Aristotle demands attention and doesn't mind petting or a good chin/cheek rub.

accountant and unfortunately we speak that way, and at times I begin to think that way myself, but then I am reminded of why I like her so, as she gently "coos" for me to come over and massage her head and neck through the bars of her cage. This crow reminds me of a German Shepherd that I had once owned that would look so deeply in my eyes with great trust and loyalty – I feel a great feeling of "connectiveness" during our times of interaction.

Once Aristotle's cage door is open, it's up and out, a bit of rapid stationary flapping, and then on to my shoulder to travel wherever the road (or for that matter, wherever my big feet walking over the hardwood floors) takes us.

The thieving tendency of corvids is strong and rather well known, but with age and repetitive reinforcement, Aristotle has evolved from a constant jump down, steal whatever I put down that is light enough for her to carry, and "the chase is on," to only the temporary digression to old habits.

As her third year of life rapidly approaches, I am beginning to see the signs necessitating the acquisition of a male crow. Aristotle's activities now include the ever-increasing "fluffed" head display executed in synchronicity with a whole new

repertoire of sounds, the likes of which I have never heard. I've also begun to notice her increased sessions of "naughty Aristotle," beginning with a fluffy ball of affection then transitioning into a biting agitated Mrs. Hyde. I guess that's the drawback of a "teenager."

I have had fairly good success feeding my crow a staple diet of dog-food (high quality),

mynah pellets, thawed frozen mixed, vegetables, parrot pellets, and cheerios. I supplement the diet with plain tuna, pasta, parrot seed, apples, blueberries, blackberries, and table scrap odds and ends. This fairly well balanced diet is further enhanced by the capture of the occasional fruitfly "on the wing."

The African Pied Crow should not be recommended to just anyone, these birds are a big commitment and at times, can present themselves to be quite determined – "no" is not a known part of their vocabulary. This species, if handled, is about the most committed companion an individual may ever want, but at the same time, may drive an individual to the point of being committed!

Long before acquiring exotic corvids I had much experience with their positive as well as negative attributes, serving as a part-time wildlife rehabilitator for several years prior. My experience allowed me to make a well-informed decision prior to purchase and I feel no regrets.

If you own or are in the process of acquiring an African Pied Crow, I may only hope that your experience is or will be as positive as mine has been and you enjoy many years of "Life with a Pied Crow." ➤

Traveling by Air With Birds in the Cabin

by Sandee L. Molenda, C.A.S.
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Since the horrible tragedies of September 11th, we have all been informed of the extraordinary but much needed changes in security regarding flying. For those of us who have the occasion to fly with our bird, these have certainly been interesting times. We all acknowledge the need for the searches and screenings and as someone who flies frequently, I applaud the extra vigilance.

However, I have found, that unfortunately, many security personnel are unsure how to handle pets that are flying with their owners. I hope to offer some insight and tips on how to make your next flight with your pet as smooth and easy as possible for security personnel, owners, and above all, the bird.

Booking Your Flight

Before you book your flight, make sure the airline you choose allows pets in the cabin. Not all airlines do and all of them have the restriction of the bird fitting underneath the seat in front of you. Others limit bird size to only Cockatiel or smaller. FAA regulations allow for only two pets in the main cabin so you must make reservations for your bird with your airline. There will be a charge anywhere from \$50-\$100 each way which you will have to pay upon your check-in at the airport. Also, get a health certificate from your veterinarian no earlier than 10 days before your RETURN flight. Not all airlines require a health certificate but that