

Getting to Know ...

House Crows

They have been shouted at, chased with broomsticks, stoned, trapped, poisoned and even shot at! Yet they come back every time, gloating louder than ever - "Kaaa! Kaaa! Kaaa!" as if to say, "Catch me if you can!"

Singapore's Wild Animals and Birds Act was legislated to protect those who share our environment, but the only unprotected creature singled out in the Schedule is the House Crow, *Corvus splendens*!

Any other living creature would have got the message and moved on but not these aggressive, cheeky crows.

The House Crow is a native of India and had spread, presumably on board ships, to East Africa, South East Asia and as far as Australia. In Singapore and Malaysia, it is believed to have been introduced as pest control agent.

nest about 4 metres above ground. The female lays 4 to 6 eggs per clutch and they hatch within 18 days. Unlike most birds, both the male and female share in the incubation of the eggs. The young is able to leave the nest after 5 weeks, to feed alongside the parents and it tends to stay as a family unit. Crows can live up to 14 years.

The crow is highly intelligent. It has been videotaped to drop palm nuts onto residential streets and waited for passing vehicles to crack them before coming in for the feed. In Japan, it has been recorded to select a pedestrian crossing to drop the hard-shelled nut so as to reduce the risk of being rundown when the Traffic Light turns green!



fungus (*Histoplasma capsulatum*) causing histoplasmosis, should people breathe in the spores. To be fair, the other birds also pose this danger but being bigger in size, we are more apprehensive of the crows.

To date no method of control or elimination has worked because crows are intelligent and very suspicious. Baiting is a preferred method but unfortunately they post a sentinel while the rest feed in batches. This sentry will



Avoid leaving food leftovers for crows.

Crows may be spreading disease

I WRITE once again to reiterate the dangers posed by crows. These scavenger birds

I am dismayed that some

Crows harass him for handling baby crow

Marked man

By SHARMIKHA SINGH
FACTORY since the late 1980s

Crows attack elderly

Hired gun man at Toh Yi Drive
bring down crows

By SHARMIKHA SINGH
AS PART of its war on crows, the Environment Ministry (ENV) has hired four Singapore Gun Club members to shoot down the scav-

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Crows do not transmit
HFMD but are still pests

within the next 10 years.

In Singapore we recognize it from its native cousin, the Large-billed Crow, *Corvus macrorhynchos*, by a broad greyish collar encompassing nape, slender black body and its smaller size (total length of up to 43 cm, compared to the Large-billed Crow's 59 cm).

Being omnivorous, its diet includes the meat of traffic-killed animals along our Expressways but they seem intelligent enough to avoid being run over. An American study shows that crows seem to have a balanced diet, confining one-third of their food to animal matter including insects, and the remainder to vegetable and plant matter including corn and nuts.

The House Crow is highly gregarious and lives in noisy communal roosts with its

So why are crows pest?

Firstly, many people see them as symbol of evil. Alfred Hitchcock's movie classic "The Birds" certainly cast them on the dark side. This is reinforced by newspaper reports of crows attacking humans in our housing estates in isolated incidents.

Secondly, they are extremely aggressive and noisy. With their growing number of nesting and roosting in our urban areas, where they have few predators, they harass other birds and feed on their eggs. Their dominance is not liked.

Thirdly, their droppings and roosts pose a potential health hazard, with diseases like *transmissible gastroenteritis* (TGE) and avian cholera, and they also harbour

sound the alarm if it senses any danger and the whole flock will create such a din that even the other birds, including the Mynahs, will take heed. Any poison bait that takes effect quickly will be shied.

One technique is to use a chemical with a 4 to 5 days delayed-effect (e.g. an anticoagulant). This means that the crows will not be able to detect the lethal source. To employ this method successfully, there has to be a programme of pre-baiting and the authorities need to mount a publicity campaign so that members of the public will not be unduly alarmed should they see dead crows.

How much longer will the crows grab the newspaper headlines in Singapore? Will the crows survive an all out war? Well, only time will tell.



If you need any help in the control of pest birds, please contact Aardwolf Pestkare (Tel: 6268 1771 for our 24-hour service). Our staff will be very happy to conduct a FREE SURVEY before advising you.