

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Crows

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

The common crow is found across the continental United States, except for the arid southwest, and has easily found a place in developed areas. Although crows may get a bad rap by many, they're fascinatingly clever animals, exhibiting a range of behaviors we wouldn't expect from a bird.

Their main predators are raptors, and when feeding in a group they'll often post sentinels to keep an eye out while the other members of the group eat. If a raptor poses a threat, instead of fleeing the predator, it isn't unusual for the crows to mob together and go after the predator. Research has even indicated that crows can distinguish between hawks that are hunting and those merely passing through, allowing the latter to go on their way unmolested.

While our own observations may lead us to think that crows subsist mainly on road kill, they are omnivorous, showing some pretty clever behavior to get food. They've been seen working as a team to steal food – one crow distracting an otter while the other crows steal his fish. They open food like nuts and clams by carrying them into the air and letting them drop onto a hard surface, and one crow was seen killing a hatchling snapping turtle this way. They also have been seen using tools – to carry water, to probe holes for insects, and even dropping pine cones on a tree climber nearing a nest.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.