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On the Hunt for Nut Cracking Crows

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New Caledonian crows love the candle nut forests around Sarramea where they drop candle nuts from a height to crack them open for a meal. We found a nut cracking site and Alex Taylor explained how it all works. Step 1: Find a tall tree branch positioned high above a flat rock. Step...

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New Caledonian crows love the candle nut forests around Sarramea where they drop candle nuts from a height to crack them open for a meal.



The forest around Sarramea: the tall trees with light bark and spindly branches are candle nut trees. Copyright Corina Logan.



Whole candle nuts. Copyright Corina Logan.

We found a nut cracking site and Alex Taylor explained how it all works.

Step 1: Find a tall tree branch positioned high above a flat rock.



A candle nut tree with the anvil rock at the base. Copyright Corina Logan.

Step 2: Drop candle nut from branch so that it falls on to the rock and cracks open.



The anvil rock up close. Copyright Corina Logan.

Step 3: Grab a cracked candle nut piece and jam it in a log to gain leverage to get the meat out (watch the video to see the log with a shell piece stuck in it).



Loads of shell pieces around the anvil rock. Copyright Corina Logan.

We also got to see some wild New Caledonian crows! They live in the forest canopy in family groups consisting of a mated pair and their offspring.

That wraps up my 8-week New Caledonian crow research trip. It has been productive! I completed three experiments, which you can read about and see the videos for when the scientific publications come out so follow me on twitter ([@LoganCorina](#)) or watch the news section of my website for updates ([www.CorinaLogan.com](#)). These birds are truly amazing and I feel very lucky to have had the chance to work with them.

Already missing the crows (especially Kitty and Yellow),
Corina

And now for a bit of Terry Pratchett...

There was a raven perched on the broken crown of a pine tree, shattered in some winter storm. It looked at them looking at it.

'Caw?' it said.

'It's just a raven,' said Lobsang. 'There's lots of them in the valley.'

'It was watching us when we stopped.'

'There's ravens all over the mountains, Sweeper.'

...

'Maybe it's a special raven,' said Lu-Tze. 'Anyway, it's not one of our mountain ravens. It's a lowland raven. Mountain ravens croak. They don't caw. Why's it so interested in us?'

'It's a bit...weird, thinking you're being followed by a bird,' said Lobsang.

...

They faded into time, and vanished.

The raven ruffled its feathers.

'Croak?' it said. 'Damn.'

...

Lobsang pulled himself aboard and the stick rose. As it drew level with the lower branches around the clearing, it brought Lu-Tze to eye level with a raven.

'Are you going to caw or croak, I wonder,' said Lu-Tze, apparently to himself.

'Croak,' said the raven.

'So you're not the raven we saw on the other side of the mountain, then.'

'Me? Gosh, no,' said the raven. 'That's croaking territory over there.'

'Just checking'

The broom rose higher, and set off above the trees in a Hubwards direction.

The raven ruffled its feathers and blinked.

'Damn!' it said. It shuffled around the tree to where the Death of Rats was sitting.

SQUEAK?

'Look, if you want me to do this undercover work you've got to get me a book on ornithology, OK?' said Quoth.

(Pratchett, 2001, Thief of Time)

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MEET THE AUTHOR

Corina Logan

For my PhD at the University of Cambridge, I studied what birds in the crow family do after they fight: do they make up with each other or go to someone else for support? Now I am a Junior Research Fellow at the SAGE Center for the Study of the Mind at the University of California, Santa Barbara. With the help of a National Geographic Society / Waitt Grant, I study what birds know about their physical and social worlds. (Photo copyright Rod Rolle)



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