

Common Raven

Corvus corax principalis

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DESCRIPTION

Taxonomy and Basic Description

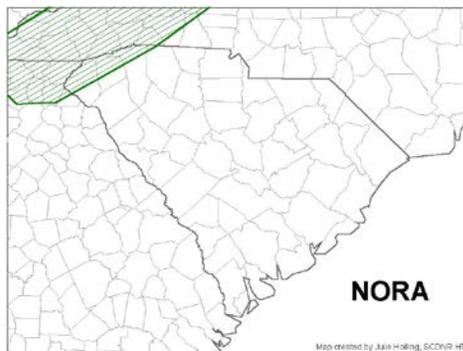
The Common Raven is the largest North American passerine (Order: Passeriformes) at 689 to 1,625 g (24 to 57 oz.) (Boarman and Heinrich 1999).

The bird's plumage is glossy-black and it has long, pointed wings and a wedge-shaped tail. Four subspecies of Common Raven occur in North America, with *C. c. principalis* being the one to occur in South Carolina (Boarman and Heinrich 1999).

Status

The Common Raven is protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act but receives no special federal status. According to Partners in Flight, the Common Raven is a low priority species within the Southern Blue Ridge physiographic area (Hunter et al. 1999). However, they may be of local conservation concern in some states. They are not listed on the 2003 South Carolina Rare, Threatened and Endangered Species Inventory, but are of special interest to ornithologists in South Carolina. The Common Raven is listed as threatened in Tennessee, as endangered in Kentucky, and as extinct in New Jersey and Alabama (Boarman and Heinrich 1999). Based on these designations, South Carolina's populations could be viewed as responsibility groups; hence the Common Raven is included on the priority list for the SC SWAP.

POPULATION SIZE AND DISTRIBUTION



Global population size estimates are 16 million for the Common Raven (Rich et al. 2004; Nolan et al. 2002), while approximately 4 million ravens occur in the US and Canada (Rich et al. 2004).

The Common Raven is resident from Alaska south to southern Mexico, from western Canada to Maine, and south along the Appalachians to northern Georgia (Boarman and Heinrich 1999).

The Common Raven is a resident in South Carolina (Boarman and Heinrich 1999) and could potentially still breed in Greenville and Pickens County (Cely 2003; McNair 1988). However, populations of Common Raven are apparently rare in the State.

HABITAT AND NATURAL COMMUNITY REQUIREMENTS

The Common Raven occurs in a broad range of habitats but prefers cliffs and contoured landscapes with thermals for long-distance foraging. This bird also requires trees or structures (buildings) for nesting (Boarman and Heinrich 1999). In the Southern Appalachians, the Common Raven often nests in the same areas as peregrine falcons. Most Common Raven nests in Tennessee and North Carolina are located on rock ledges and cliffs.

The Common Raven is a generalist omnivore that eats carrion as well as eggs, freshly killed small animals, grains, insects, fruits, and garbage (Boarman and Heinrich 1999). The Common Raven cannot open carcasses and relies on, and often follows, carnivores and scavengers (Boarman and Heinrich 1999).

CHALLENGES

The Common Raven was likely formerly extirpated in South Carolina due to human persecution (Boarman and Heinrich 1999) since it was often shot for allegedly killing infant lambs (Boarman and Heinrich 1999). Logging may have also contributed to the species' decline in Virginia and Pennsylvania at the beginning of the twentieth century (Boarman and Heinrich 1999). Conversely, degradation of native habitat (development) likely contributed to Common Raven population increases in some areas due to increased food (human garbage), water (irrigation), and shelter (structures) (Boarman and Heinrich 1999).

CONSERVATION ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In the early 1900s, Common Raven populations had decreased throughout Eastern North America. However, by the 1950s, the populations had increased and the species had re-colonized sections of its previous range (Boarman and Heinrich 1999).

CONSERVATION RECOMMENDATIONS

- Survey and monitor high elevation sites to determine the distribution, densities, and nest survival rates of breeding Common Raven populations in South Carolina.
- Evaluate ways to supplement natural re-colonization for the Common Raven to attain historic population densities.
- Monitor Common Raven breeding sites and protect them from destruction or excessive human disturbance.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

As the above-mentioned action items are accomplished and yield valuable information, adaptive management procedures will be evaluated and implemented for this bird species.

LITERATURE CITED

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