

GIFTS OF THE CROW by John Marzluff & Tony Angell © 2012 Free Press
208 pages, 289 pages with index, references, notes and appendices
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Reviewed by Neil Deupree

How does a crow's brain work?

It's a complex question with complex answers.

The clues come from dozens of examples of the behavior of corvids: crows, ravens, jays and magpies. The stories and observations lead us to compare their intellect – and emotions (!) with our own.

The authors give examples of how crows behave like humans and then describe how they can be explained by analyzing the physical structure of the many parts of their bird brains.

For example:

- A crow that calls dogs – and they come.
- A crow that brings a candy heart to the human that feeds him.
- Crows that grieve the death of a comrade.
- Crows that make and use tools to get food.
- Crows that recognize a particular human being. (Can we recognize individual crows without leg bands?)
- Crows that hold a grudge against a certain person and teach other crows to harass that person.

See what I mean?

The authors go into great detail as they explain the parts of a corvid's brain. They have appendices with illustrations. Confession: I get to the point of skipping over the physiological details in the text that seemed primarily aimed at neuropsychologists.

The case studies and the descriptions of experiments are captivating, and invite me to look at the crows in our pine tree with a friendlier eye – and a sense of commonality.

Note: Marzluff's raven research has been featured in PBS's *Nature*: "Ravens." He also has a documentary film: "A Murder of Crows."

Note also: Anyone have personal experiences with corvids that illustrate their ability to think? Please let us know.