

THE AUSTRALIAN RAVEN

Corvus coronoides

The Australian Raven is the largest Australian member of the genus *Corvus* and one of three Australian species commonly known as ravens. It is a more slender bird than the Common Raven of the Northern Hemisphere but is otherwise similar. It has all-black plumage, beak and legs with a white iris, as do the other *Corvus* members in Australia and some species from the islands to the north. It is distinguished by its prominent throat hackles and grey bases of its black feathers.

It is omnivorous and has adapted well to settlement and is a common in towns and cities around the nation.

The species was first described by Nicholas Aylward Vigors and Thomas Horsfield in 1827; its specific epithet *coronoides* "crow-shaped" is derived from the Greek *corone*/κορωνα "crow" and *eidos*/ειδος "shape" or "form". This was because Vigors and Horsfield considered the species very similar in appearance to the Carrion Crow, *C. corone*, of Europe.

Although called a raven, it more closely resembles the other four species of Australian corvid, which include the Torresian Crow, *C. orru*, Little Crow, *C. bennetti*, the Forest Raven, *C. tasmanicus*, and the Little Raven, *C. mellori*. Alternate names sometimes used include *Southern Raven*, *Southern Crow*, and *Kelly*. They were called *wugan* by the indigenous Eora and Darug inhabitants of the Sydney basin.

Two subspecies are recognised: *C. c. coronoides*, the nominate subspecies, is found across most of eastern Australia, while *C. c. perplexus* occurs from the head of the Great Australian Bight in South Australia westwards into Western Australia north to Shark Bay and the mulga-eucalypt boundary line. Intermediate birds are found on the Eyre Peninsula, in the Gawler Ranges and in the vicinity of Lake Eyre in South Australia.

Australian Ravens are 46-53cm (18-21 inches) in length with a 100cm (40 inches) wingspan and weigh around 650g. The adult bird is all black with black feet and beak and a white iris. The plumage, with the exception of the under-parts, is glossy with a blue-purple to blue-green sheen, greenish over the ear coverts, depending on the light. Its throat feathers (hackles) are longer than those of the other species. They can be distinguished from the two Australian Crow species by the grey base of the feathers, which in the latter case are white. Juveniles are similar to adults, but have dark eyes, shorter throat hackles, and sometimes have a pink fleshy gape.

The territorial call of the Australian Raven is a slow, high *ah-ah-ah-aaaah* with the last note drawn out. They use this call to communicate with other

ravens in the area. Visually the five Australian corvid species can be very difficult to tell apart, their vocalisation being the easiest way to do so.

The Australian Raven is common throughout eastern, southern and southern Western Australia (the populations being connected by a narrow strip across the Nullarbor Plain) but is absent in the far north.

In rural areas a single breeding pair, and their brood, occupy about a square kilometre territory, whilst in urban areas up to ten times as many ravens can exist in the same sized area.

Their diet consists of carrion, insects, seeds, fruit, small reptiles, nestlings and eggs. The preference ratio is 34% carrion, 42% invertebrates and 24% plant material. Food is taken mainly from the ground but they will occasionally feed in trees. The species has adapted well to foraging for rubbish and scraps in urban areas, such as school playgrounds.

The breeding season is from July to September. Australian Ravens always nest in tall trees, never near the ground. Nests are generally large and untidy, consisting of a bowl or platform of sticks lined with grasses, bark, and feathers. The usual clutch consists of 3-6 eggs, although 4 or 5 are the norm. The eggs measure 45x30mm (1¾x1¼ inches), and are pale green or bluish-green splotched with dark olive, brown and blackish markings. The female only incubates the eggs, with hatching occurring in roughly twenty days. Barring accidents, just one brood is raised per season. The young fledge by forty-five days and stay with their parents for about four months after that.

The Australian Raven is frequently blamed for the loss of young lambs. However, scientific observation in the southeast of the continent revealed that the killing of healthy lambs was rare, but that sick animals were predisposed to being attacked.

R.V.C. with help from Wikipedia

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

Owls are far-sighted, and are unable to see anything clearly within a few inches of their eyes. Caught prey can be felt by owls with the use of filoplumes, which are small hair-like feathers on the beak and feet that act as "feelers"?

the smallest owl is the Elf Owl, *Micrathene whitney*, that weighs just 31g (1.1 oz) and is 13.5cm (5.3 inches) in length?

the Ancient Egyptians used a representation of an owl for their hieroglyph for the sound *m*, and that they would often draw this hieroglyph with its legs broken to keep this bird of prey from coming to life?

one family of hungry Barn Owls (family *Tytonidae*) can consume more than 3,000 rodents in a nesting season?

in many parts of the world, owls have been associated with death and misfortune, likely due to their nocturnal activity and common screeching call.?