

The following editorial appeared in the Sunday News edition of the Lancaster Newspapers, on February 26th, 2006. It cites letters from the public received before it – from all over the world – and they follow this editorial on the subsequent pages of this document (along with letters received after 2/26 as well). While the editor's failure to mention the cruelty of the poisoning – in concept and in the way it actually kills – is regrettable, the editorial is quite right about the potential for harm to other animals and humans. This threat is real and should not be forgotten, and should guide the hand of those who'll decide whether or not to use poison again next year. The public will be watching, and hopefully not standing still for more cruelty and more toxins to be added to our environment.



Bird Brains

The way the crow problem was handled gives people plenty to squawk about.

Well, we killed a bunch of crows and drove a lot of others away.

Apparently crows get nervous when they see black feathered carcasses on their doorstep.

The question is, what else are we killing along with the crows?

Lancaster County's reputation, for sure. As if we didn't have enough trouble with puppy mills, now we're slaughtering birds.

An even bigger concern than what the rest of the world thinks about us – judging from the international outcry, not much – is the Law of Unintended Consequences, which, if it comes into play with crows as much as it does with government, means something unanticipated is going to happen with all that DRC-1339 being spread around the suburbs.

Government officials have been trying for years to do something about the growing crow roost in the northern suburbs of the city. Noisemaking cannons, hanging fake crows in effigy and predator calls didn't have much effect on the roost, estimated at some 60,000 birds.

Property owners were complaining about damage from crow droppings. The roost was becoming Hitchcockian in size and impact on the community.

So, in desperation, the crow task force got permission to use DRC-1339, an avicide that all experts assure us is lethal only to crows.

It took a while before the crows took the bait, in the form of poisoned dog kibble, spread on plywood sheets in fields near the roost.

But when crows were tempted to sample the kibble, they started dying.

And now, the crow people say, some 83 percent of the birds have left the roost. The biggest

roost has split into smaller groups, with the largest now about 10,000 crows.

Residents have been assured that the poison is collected after feeding time, so that other wildlife or pets don't share the crows' fate.

As others have noted, though, crows are notorious for “caching” or stashing, food for a rainy day. So how do we know that all the poison has really been taken out of the food chain?

For that matter, what about predators who nibble on dead crow?

Yes, we know. DRC-1339 isn't poisonous to other species.

Isn't it?

We can only hope that some day, the assurances about the safety of DRC-1339 don't ring hollow.

Don't forget, there's no assurance that the roost won't be back next year. Crows disperse in March. They generally return over winter.

And if they're back, what then? More poison?

More opportunities for something to go wrong?

We are not in the habit of hugging trees or refusing to swat mosquitoes. The crows are a nuisance.

We just aren't comfortable with poison as a solution, given that pesky law of unintended consequences.

Manheim Township manager, Jim Martin, the leader of the crow task force, and Chris Crosson, the federal Wildlife Services agent supervising the poisoning, may want to hope that menacing flocks of crows don't start following them around, as in “The Birds”, with vengeance on their bird brains.

Yes, the crows may be gone.

But the way it was accomplished is nothing to crow about.

The following letters have appeared in the Intelligencer Journal in Lancaster PA since 2/5/06. Officials' statements that the public isn't concerned are clearly incorrect. From local citizens to observers from across the US and as far away as the United Kingdom, it's quite clear that poisoning Lancaster County's visiting crows is unacceptable, dangerous, and seen as yet another blight on the image of Lancaster – to potential tourists, businesses, and people around the world.

Intelligencer Journal

Three Editorials from the Sunday Intelligencer Journal, 2/5/06:

KILLING CROWS:

Shame on Us

I am writing concerning your unethical solution to your so-called “crow problem”. I cannot believe you are resulting to mass extermination. Shame on you all.

If you think that your actions are going unnoticed, you are very wrong. I live 3,000 miles away, and I heard of what you are doing and am outraged. This will result in negative actions against the city of Lancaster and the great state of Pennsylvania. Your so-called problem with crows will be nothing compared to the lost revenue from tourism, resulting in boycotts.

I ask that you find a safe, sane solution to your problem with these beautiful birds. Who lived there first, crows or humans?

Adrienne Harris, California

Deserved to Die?

My nine-year-old grandson came home from school and in the yard was the still-warm body of a crow. Lancaster County prides itself on Christianity and family values environment.

Please tell me how do you explain to a child who as been taught to respect life and love nature that the Township of Manheim has decided to execute these birds because they are “in the way”. How was this beautiful, intelligent bird “so bad” that he deserved to die.

Manheim Township is supposed to be one of the more enlightened communities, or so they like to tell everyone.

It is obvious that the groups who advocate taking money with development again win over those who wish quality if life. I am still trying to convince my grandson that most people do indeed respect nature and life. There should be a better way.

Judy Eaton, Mount Joy

Crows Adapt to Us

Crows found ways to adapt to intrusion by humans without resorting to killing us. It's too bad we are not as clever.

Shelby Chunko, Mount Joy

Intelligencer Journal

Three Letters to the Editor from Monday's Intelligencer Journal, 2/6/06

Poor Response



TO THE EDITOR:

Efforts to change crow behavior, established over many thousands of years, is misguided. Poisoning many innocent birds, including crows, is pathetic. Crows take care of their young, use tools and communicate with each other as a family unit. Shame on our response.

Dan Watt, Strasburg

Killing of Crows Evokes Feelings of Sorrow

TO THE EDITOR:

I find it difficult to choose adequate words to describe my deep feelings of sorrow upon seeing the blaring headline “Crows Chow Down on Killer Kibble at Two County Sites” (Intell, Jan 28) and reading at least some of the details concerning this planned killing.

I trust those responsible for this decision of (even by their own admission) questionable long-term effectiveness realize crows, as members of the genus *Corvus*, are birds of exceptional intelligence and social structure. They form monogamous family units in which offspring remain for periods as long as ten years. They are tool users. Through a complex system of vocalizations, body movements and eye changes, they communicate extensively with one another. Their relationships with humans extend far back through time. I only wish our reverence for their place in the world could be as informed as the reverence of our ancestors.

The recently published “In the Company of Crows and Ravens” by John M. Marzluff and Tony Angell, provides excellent information about these special birds. We all would be better for reading this book.

Christopher Carroll Barton, Lancaster

TO THE EDITOR:

As a city resident, I enjoy watching the various forms of wildlife that appear in my yard. When I left for work the morning of January 26, I was dismayed to find a dead hawk in my flower bed. Its feet were clenched tightly as if it had suffered a seizure, but there were no other signs of trauma in what appeared to have been a very healthy animal. I thought perhaps the hawk had struck a power line.

Unsure of what to do, I contacted two different government authorities—a veterinarian working with the government on the avian flu problem and the Pennsylvania Game Commission. Neither wanted to examine the hawk and told me to “dispose of it”.

Later that day, I read the newspaper article about poisoning crows on the previous afternoon. Now, I know exactly how this beautiful raptor died.

Linda Frank, Lancaster

Intelligencer Journal

Four Letters to the Editor from the Sunday News (Intelligencer-Journal), FEBRUARY 12, 2006

The Big Squawk:

Share with the Birds

I must add my two cents’ worth to the crow debate. Surely we can share some of our plenty with the crows.



Buggy horses make messes, cows make messes, and dogs make plenty of messes. Shall we eliminate all? Furthermore, I wonder why Native Americans haven’t spoken up for crows. Crow feathers were highly prized for fletching arrows, and crows were used as lookouts.

Mary Weston, Lancaster, PA

Foreign Affair

Interesting to see Lancaster County officials have poisoned the crows again without warning the public, yet the US Environmental Protection Agency warns that people, pets, and livestock should be kept away from the bait at all times.

Interesting that dead crows are left lying in ponds and other water sources.

Interesting that the scientists at early meetings were overruled and ignored when they warned of the risks of secondary poisoning and poison entering the food chain.

Evidence of gene mutations, structural chromosomal aberrations, and genotoxic effects has been found. By the time these start showing up in your community, these same dangerous officials will be long gone. At least people all over the world are watching them, because they are accountable.

Catherine McCarthy, Cambridge, United Kingdom

More Bad Press for County



It now seems that not only will Lancaster be known as the “Puppy Mill Capital” of the East Coast, but we also can add bird killers as well. What a glorious image we must present to anyone who truly loves and respects all forms of life.

We pollute our lawns with toxic chemicals that kill song birds. We tear down the woods in which they once lived. Now we have to resort to poisoned dog food for intelligent crows because they don’t leave our town as quickly as we would like. Shame on Manheim Township Commissioners for this horror of dead crows in our fields and developments. You have built a dog park; can we be fully assured that our beloved canines won’t possibly eat a piece of food that was somehow exposed to these chemicals?

I remember well the turkeys that ran wild near Ruby Dam, the enjoyment they gave us for the few years they were allowed to live, and the horrible night they were shot out of the trees in which they roosted. So very sad, and stupid, as well.

Find a better solution, Manheim Township. These birds deserve our compassion.

Carole V. Herr, Lititz, PA

Stewards of the Earth?

I am writing to voice my extreme disappointment in Manheim Township and East Hempfield Township for resorting to DRC-1339 poison in killing crows. They made an uninformed decision without the input the community.

Crows are highly social birds and tend to care for each other very much like human families. The assumption that these birds will not suffer is completely false, as suffering for the poisoned birds is likely to last two to three days and it will be equally painful for the family group.

Different crow family groups come together in the winter months to form large foraging flocks. This is what Lancaster County is encountering right now. Rather than working to destroy this native bird, residents and officials should be come educated on the habitat and migrating patterns of the crow and work to lessen the human impact on its existence.

I can’t really believe that poisoning crows is what was in mind when humans were entrusted as stewards of the earth.

Shannon M. Zimmerman, Elizabethtown, PA



Outraged by Plan to Poison Crows

TO THE EDITOR:

I am saddened and appalled that Lancaster County has sunk to yet a lower level of insensitivity and lack of compassion.

I guess Lancaster's legacy of tolerance for inhumane puppy mills as well as state and local elected officials' intolerance toward religious or private "moral" choices made by their constituents should have made me sufficiently numbed to the news that we are going to kill 50,000 "pesky" crows with a pesticide-laden bait spread on our nearby suburban fields.

Now, we can't tolerate migratory birds fouling buildings, cars, and sidewalks. Have we run out of hoses and car washes as well as compassion?

The article "Poisoning program targeting pesky crows" (Intell, Jan. 26) states the toxin DRC-1339 is mixed into bait such as bread, "animal food pellets" or corn. It's hoped the carcasses will deter the other birds from roosting.

However, the article goes on to say residents are asked to call the streets department to pick up the dead birds. So, does this mean these intelligent and sociable animals, having died a slow and painful death, will lie dead in our fields and backyards until some other animal, like Fifi, Tiddles, or Sweetums, decides to try a taste?

Township officials tell us it won't cause death or serious harm to other non-targeted animals. Do you really believe this? Would they want their pet to ingest DRC-1339? And what about foxes, rabbits, squirrels, and other birds?

Surely there must be many more who are outraged. I ask others who have compassion in their hearts to speak up. It's never too late. Never.

Rebecca Cavanaugh, Manheim



Outraged by Plan to Poison Crows

TO THE EDITOR:

I am disgusted at the wanton disregard for life shown by the Lancaster County businesses and individuals participating in the slaughter of crows by poison.

Did any participant in this massacre, I wonder, get involved in protesting Lancaster County's puppy mills? If so, does that mean animal life is only worth preserving if it's cuddly and can be trained to fetch your slippers?

Given that the killers patently do not care about condemning these sociable, highly intelligent birds, who have been found to be on the intellectual level of a human toddler, to agonizing death by kidney failure, here's the bottom line...

I have a large extended family, which has previously enjoyed vacationing in Lancaster County and spending money here. No longer.

Now informed about the Lancaster crow killings, my family – and their wallets – will be staying away from Lancaster County until this murderous idiocy is halted.

Gwyn McVay, Lancaster



Destroying Habitats and Inhabitants

TO THE EDITOR:

What is happening to the crows is happening to wildlife in other areas. It has been devastating to try to explain to children and wildlife-loving people why this occurs.

Apparently, those with gifts to politicians get heard because their businesses are being disrupted by creatures who have had their breeding grounds and nesting areas invaded by humans.

Instead of using all of the available space in our area, why don't some of these businesses plant commons, courtyards, and parks where wildlife can stay?



The film "Elephant Walk" was about a man who built a fabulous mansion in the middle of an elephant path in Ceylon. The elephants destroyed the mansion and took back their path. Naturalists say the crows are smart. Half of the crows you see are ravens. Learn to live with nature or learn to live to regret destroying it.

American Indians only kill animals when they are hungry. I don't think any of the people involved in this latest slaughter are hungry for crow.

Mary Catherine Edelman, Millersville

Circle of Life

TO THE EDITOR:

This letter is in response to Paul Ripple's letter (Intell, Feb. 20 – note: Mr. Ripple wrote about crows eating other bird's young).

We need not intervene in the circle of life. Are you going to intervene if you see a hawk or owl ready to strike its prey?

Juli Burke, Willow Street



Callous Attitude Toward Birds

TO THE EDITOR:

When migrating birds are beyond annoying just poison them. If dogs, livestock, or poultry are too costly to raise normally, try mass-producing them in dark, Satanic mills. If your passion is to hunt down resident wildlife, get yourself licensed and go have fun with rifle or shotgun.

Is Lancaster County running a gigantic animal cruelty operation? Maybe what is happening here is not deliberate medieval-style cruelty but something creepier and profoundly disrespectful – a utilitarian mindlessness toward other, non-human beings. Is this the real "banality of evil"?

Animal intelligence and emotional capacities are often duly noted, then quickly brushed aside to let people get on with their "need" or "right" to exploit other creatures, especially in pursuit of money. After all, our economy was built on, and still rides on, the backs of animals.

Yet, in Alice Walker's words, "The animals of the world exist for their own reasons. They were not made for humans any more than black people were made for whites or women for men."

If animals are to be treated only as a means to ends, not as ends in themselves with their own rights, then humans should be charged with far more responsibilities, to offset their flagrantly ill-deserved "human rights" and their exquisite callousness.

Beth H. Bonner, Ephrata

On March 5th, 2006, the following letters appeared in response to the Sunday News' editorial published on February 26th :

THE CROWS



Distressed by Killings

What a delightful piece in Sunday's paper. I read it aloud at the Sunday dinner table to my family, and we loved it. Before I reached the part about "A modest proposal", my son was referring to Swift's work.

My daughter, Emily, is the land steward for Lancaster County Conservancy and, like us all, is distressed. Thanks for bringing your writing talents to the forefront on the regrettable action.

Tim Kauffman, Lancaster

Share with Animals

I feel you insulted the slug, but you articulated what my husband and I feel.

Every day I have a morning routine of feeding "my crows" and "my squirrels". I also replace the towel on the floor of the "weather shelter" we created for neighborhood homeless cats and refill their food and water bowls that we've placed inside.

Back inside, there are two cats and a dog (all of who were rescued) waiting patiently. By the time I return, my coffee is ready, and I continue on with my day knowing I've helped some other living beings who truly deserve it. I am in awe of their intelligence and rewarded constantly with their beauty and unconditional love. I am blessed to be able to share my life with animals.

Lorri Rhinier, Lancaster



There is Still Hope

Thank you so very much for printing your thoughts on the crow poisonings. I and several others have tried desperately to get another side of this story known to the public. Unfortunately, the first and last words seemed to go to Mr. Martin and others involved in the poisoning.

As the only licensed wildlife rehabilitator in Lancaster County, I am truly afraid for the future of wildlife and humans in the area. Where will I release the 300 or so animals that come in for care this year? Cars, human cruelty, habitat destruction due to increased human development are all limiting the space. And now, in whatever space may be left, there is poison, federally regulated and dispersed. I cannot touch a bird without federal permission, and yet they can completely wipe them out if the price is right.

Until today, I believed this crime would go unchallenged. I am glad to see there is still hope. Plan to attend Lancaster County's first attempt to establish a League of Humane Voters (3 pm, March 19, Carr's Restaurant, Lancaster).

Michele Calabretta Nicarry, Lancaster



Invites Crows to Her Area

Your column was excellent. However, the idiots who poisoned the crows do not have enough intelligence to understand the message from your words.

I live in the northern part of Lancaster County, near Mount Joy, and would love to see more crows in my rural area. The thought of poisoning these beautiful, intelligent birds makes me very sad. I decided I will no longer spend money in Lancaster, East Petersburg, or Manheim Township. I will travel to York to do my shopping and spend my money in a county where they do not poison crows. It may be an inconvenience for me, but I do not wish to contribute to an economic area that does not value the life of defenseless beings.

That puppy mills continue to thrive in this county also says a lot about the greed and mentality of local government.

Linda Spickler, Rapho Township



Short and Sweet

Touche! Terrific read! Thanks.

Patsy Lavinia, East Lampeter