

Crows and Ravens

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In reference to my article on "Birds of Lake Frome District," in the April part of vol. xxii. of *The Emu*, *Corvus ceciliae*, Aust. Crow . . . "down smoky grey." The quoted words refer to young birds in nest, and not to the down on adult birds. I tried to be as brief as possible, and fear I have rather overdone it, and it may tend to confuse readers. I have not separated Crows and Ravens, but have given Bennett's Crow as a separate species.

My reason for not separating Crows and Ravens is that I can find no consistent difference between them, and as their habits are similar, I am rather inclined to think them the same species, or maybe of sub-specific rank.

The eyes of all Crows, including Bennett's Crow, are at birth a bluish colour, which in a few days changes to a light brown or hazel, and the adults have white eyes—so that we cannot separate the Crow from the Raven in this way. The down of nestlings of Crow, Raven, and Bennett's Crow is dusky or smoky grey. Adult birds of Bennett's Crow have pure white bases to all the feathers on body. I have handled so-called Ravens with lanceolate plumes or heckles on throat, with white bases to all feathers on body, also have handled adult so-called Crows without heckles, with dusky bases to feathers of the hind neck and back; in fact, I'm so much confused that I cannot make certain of more than the two species, Bennett's Crow and Crows (which include Ravens).

In Bennett's Crow the first moult evidently brings up the white-based feathers, for I have never seen a breeding bird with grey bases to feathers. In the rest of the Crows breeding birds are frequently found with grey bases to feathers.

Years ago I was responsible for the slaughter of thousands of Crows, but now that I have seen the error of my ways, and know their value, I do not care to destroy them to make the extensive examination necessary to determine if we really have two Crows besides Bennett's small variety.

Can any of your readers help by giving their observations in *The Emu*? Do the so-called Ravens and other crows interbreed? How old is the supposed Raven before he attains the heckles on the neck?

Is it not possible for our Zoological Gardens to decide this question for us? Male and female of so-called Ravens could be mated and their progeny carefully observed and results recorded; the same could be done with the so-called Australian Crows. Bennett's Crows could also be mated with the other Crows. It is an interesting study and should prove if we really have three distinct species of *Corvidæ* in Australia.