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## Fish Crow *Corvus ossifragus*

The Fish Crow is known by its nasal, falsetto call, different from the harsh cawing of the American Crow. It is slightly smaller than the American Crow, with a smaller bill and more slender, pointed wings. Its plumage is glossier with more iridescence on the upper parts. Its flight is like the American Crow but quicker, and it sails more.

The Fish Crow is found along river systems and tidal marshes in the eastern United States from Massachusetts to south Florida and west to south Texas. In recent years, the Fish Crow has been extending its range northward along the eastern seaboard.

**Habitat.** Normally associated with coastal marshes and beaches and shores of inland lakes, rivers, and marshes (Goodwin 1976), the Fish Crow is moving into drier woodland habitats, where it often occurs sympatrically with the American Crow. Habitat requirements of the 2 crow species cannot be easily separated.

The Fish Crow's diet is highly variable but includes a large proportion of marine and other invertebrates, carrion, birds eggs (especially those of colonial waterbirds), and berries, fruit, and seeds.



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The nesting habits are similar to those of the American Crow. However, Fish Crows may start egg laying 1 or 2 months later, usually in April or May. It may nest in small colonies or groups, but often only 1 nest is found per tree. In Brevard County Cruickshank (1980) described breeding Fish Crows as widely dispersed and pairs "surprisingly secretive and silent during nest-building and incubation." Their nests are often high in trees but may be as low as 2 m (6 ft) or less above the ground. The nest is made of twigs or small branches and the nest cup lined with fibrous bark, pine needles, hair, grass, and similar materials. Eggs are bluish or grayish-green, marked with brown or gray spots. Clutches average 4 or 5 eggs, and incubation lasts 16 to 18 days (Ehrlich et al. 1988). The altricial young fledge at about 21 days of age.

**Seasonal Occurrence.** Fish Crows are residents throughout Florida. Their numbers apparently increase in late fall and winter as northern birds move south, although a few known reports exist of migrating birds (Stevens and Anderson 1994).

Egg laying occurs in April or May.

**Status.** The Fish Crow is common in urbanized areas of both coasts and in many inland cities. It has bred in Key West, but it is absent from the Everglades, where American Crows are common.

Its inland breeding range may be overstated by the Atlas results, particularly where there are a few confirmed breeding records, because Fish Crows forage away from their nests and because the calls of young American Crows may be mistaken for those of Fish Crows.

Reed Bowman

# Fish Crow

