

## FISH CROWS IN MASSACHUSETTS

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IDENTIFICATION: The Fish Crow is most easily identified by its nasal "car" call note, although this can be confused in late spring and summer with the nasal calls of young Common Crows. An adult Fish Crow reminds me of a Common Crow with a stuffy nose, while a young Common Crow reminds me of a Fish Crow with a hoarse throat. Young Common Crow calls also have a very definitely drawn-out, baby-voice character and with experience can be distinguished from Fish Crows. Most birders will not attempt to identify a Fish Crow by voice between April (when crows begin nesting) and September, unless they have had experience with them.

Identification by sight is even trickier, and it takes even more experience. Fish Crows are generally, though not always, smaller, with slightly more pointed, broader-based wings, and their manner of flight is somewhat more buoyant than that of the Common Crow. These clues can be influenced by wind.

HISTORY IN MASSACHUSETTS: Fish Crows have been observed as stragglers in Massachusetts for well over 75 years. They were usually seen in small numbers along the southeastern coast from Acoaxet to Cambridge and occasionally at Longmeadow, Springfield, and other places in the Connecticut River Valley. These reports (Bailey 1955) were concentrated "from mid-March to mid-April, occasionally to mid-May," when they probably "drifted northward with flights of Common Crows."

On 16 July 1884, Outram Bangs collected one of a pair for the first confirmed record for Massachusetts. In 1905 from 27 March to 30 May, several birds were seen along the shores of Buzzard's Bay (Griscom and Snyder, 1955). At this time, E. H. Forbush (a former West Roxbury birder) and J. A. Farley saw 17 birds in one day and "searched long and fruitlessly for a nest." By 1955 Griscom and Snyder "confidently expected" the proved breeding of Fish Crows in Massachusetts, as the birds bred frequently in Warren County, Rhode Island, and wandered over the border into Swansea, Seekonk and Westport.

One of the best places to see Fish Crows now in Massachusetts is at the Gardner Street dump in West Roxbury off the V. F. W. Parkway. The first Fish Crow was recorded there on 29 April 1963 by Miss Jane O'Regan. After this discovery the dump received more attention from gull students and from birders wanting the Fish Crow for their lists. These crows were reported only in the winter months with an increase in early March which would soon decrease to zero. One exception was a record by Drury on 15 July 1964. The number reported each winter increased to at least 125 in 1971. The gradual increase suggested a possible nesting, and in June 1973, I found two nests in Stony Brook Reservation (Hyde Park), although the birds were probably nesting there before then. Since then Fish Crows have been reported as probable breeders in Winchester (Middlesex Fells) and Plymouth, and they probably nest in other places as well.

In winter the Fish Crows roost with Common Crows at Forest Hills Cemetery. In early January 1975, there were at least 250 Fish Crows in the 2000-crow roost. The best time to see these birds is in the late afternoon, as they come into the cemetery to roost. In winter the gates of the cemetery close at 5 o'clock, so be sure that you don't get locked in. The crows usually start arriving about two hours before sunset.

I am studying the present range of Massachusetts Fish Crows and any expansions of their range into new parts of the state. Any reliable information will be gladly welcomed. I am looking for the following information:

1. Roosting: a) location, b) number of Common and Fish Crows, c) type of habitat, d) variations in size and location through the year, e) dates, times and weather, f) relations between Fish and Common Crows.
2. Nesting: a) location, b) habitat, c) dates, d) location in relation to other Fish or Common Crows, e) territories: individual or joint defense with neighboring Fish or Common Crows? f) relations between Fish and Common Crows, g) nesting success.
3. Foraging: a) location, b) flock size, c) date, time and weather, d) relations between Fish and Common Crows.

4. Flight paths between feeding and roosting locations.
5. Behavior when preparing to leave feeding or roosting places.
6. Any flocks not engaging in foraging or nocturnal roosting.

Please send your information to

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Please include your name, address, phone number and the basis for your identification.

#### Literature Cited

1. Bailey, W. 1955. Birds in Massachusetts, When and Where to Find Them. The College Press, South Lancaster, Massachusetts.
2. Griscom, L., and D. E. Snyder. 1955. The Birds of Massachusetts: An Annotated and Revised Check List. Peabody Museum, Salem.

#### BOOK REVIEW

A Field Guide to Birds' Nests, Hall H. Harrison, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1975. xxviii + 257 pages. \$8.95.

The Massachusetts Breeding Bird Atlas Project has captured the imagination of hundreds of people and has challenged their knowledge of bird behavior, nesting habitats, and juvenile plumages. Breeding can be confirmed by any of the 10 criteria established by the Massachusetts Audubon Society; I suspect, however, that "UN = used nest found" is one of the least frequently employed, especially since the worker is advised to apply this designation with caution. Nests of many species are very similar in appearance, not all members of a species construct "typical" nests, and geographical variations occur according to the availability of building materials.

Though excellent descriptions of bird nests are available in the literature, it is often difficult to visualize their appearance from such accounts. But when written characterizations are studied simultaneously with a photograph, the individuality of a nest becomes evident quickly.

The latest addition to the well-known Peterson series neatly fills a long-standing gap in the birding literature. The heart of Hal H. Harrison's A Field Guide to Birds' Nests is his collection of color photographs, showing the nests of 222 species that breed east of the Mississippi River. Usually, in a three-by-four-inch reproduction, the nest with its clutch of eggs is shown from above together with typical vegetation. This uniformity of presentation is especially valuable for comparing the nests of different species. The remainder of the page contains a summary of each species' breeding range and habitat, description and dimensions of the nest and eggs, and miscellaneous notes. For an additional 63 species, only a verbal account is given.

This volume differs from other Peterson bird guides in several respects. As mentioned, the principal illustrations are photographs rather than the customary drawings. However, for each species whose nest is pictured, there is a fine sketch of the bird by Ned Smith. Also, there is no systematic comparison of one nest with others. Herein lies my only major criticism of the book---the lack of a key to diagnostic features of a particular nest and a comparison with other nests with which it might be confused. Such a key was organized successfully by Richard Headstrom in Whose Nest Is That?, published by the Massachusetts Audubon Society. Rather than being outmoded by the new Peterson guide, Headstrom's booklet provides essential collateral reading for Massachusetts birders engaged in practical nest identification.

Because of the on-species-per-page format in A Field Guide to Birds' Nests, Harrison's writing is telegraphic, often utilizing sentence fragments. This style is annoying, especially when one feels that the author had much more to say but ran out of space. Nevertheless, the job is business-like. On the end papers Harrison illustrates egg