

NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

Spring Flight Chronology of American Crows in Lancaster, Erie County, New York

During the winter months American Crows (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) in western New York State congregate each night in enormous roosts sometimes containing several thousand individuals (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). The 1980-85 Breeding Bird Atlas of New York State reported American Crow present in 93% of all blocks, and it was the ninth most prevalent species (Andrle and Carroll 1988). American Crows began using urban areas to roost and nest during the second half of the 20th century (McGowan and Corwin 2008). American Crows often fly to the roost along established flight lines. If you are near one of these you may observe that, for an hour or more in late afternoon, crows will be passing overhead, a few at a time (Stokes 1979).

METHODS

Observations were made from the lofty lookout on the sixth floor of the Lancaster Tower Apartments in urban Lancaster, Erie County, NY. From this vantage point the author could see across 180 degrees from east to west. The flight lines of the crows were observed over an approximately two hour period (3:40 PM to 5:40 PM) Eastern Standard Time. Sunset on 29 February was at 6:04 PM. Observations were made between 29 February and 30 March, 2020. The author was fortunate enough to be in the direct path of a major flight of crows from their forging areas to their nightly communal roost, at Stiglmeier Park in the town of Cheektowaga. The flight line led from the town of Cheektowaga, through the village of Lancaster into the town of Alden. For part of their flight, the crows used Cayuga Creek to guide them.

RESULTS

The flight line initially was from east to west and by 8 March the flight line split into two noticeable streams: the major flight direction being east to west, but with a secondary stream that headed north to northwest. These two streams may have converged later. On 29 February, I observed 1039 crows and by 25 March the numbers dwindled down to four, decreasing in a roughly exponential fashion, with a first order half-life of roughly three and one half to four days. Table 1 lists the daily counts of crows. The 5 March observation was an outlier because crows were observed for only a one hour period. The month of March 2020 was 8° Fahrenheit warmer than average. On 7 March, I observed a pair of crows breaking off from the flight line to circle locally over large white pines and perching, appearing to look for a nesting tree. On 15 March from my lookout I observed a crow bowing or bobbing its head indicating that courtship had begun. It is

assumed that the crows dispersed to their individual nesting sites gradually through the month of March.

Table 1. Counts of American Crows flying to roost in Lancaster, Erie County, NY, 29 Feb-30 March 2020.

Date	Count
29 Feb	1039
5 Mar	86
6 Mar	385
7 Mar	454
8 Mar	157
9 Mar	150
10 Mar	66
11 Mar	11
13 Mar	47
14 Mar	223
15 Mar	78
16 Mar	7
17 Mar	134
18 Mar	8
19 Mar	9
21 Mar	24
23 Mar	30
25 Mar	4
30 Mar	14

LITERATURE CITED

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