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## Renestings of American Crows in Florida and Predation by Raccoons

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**Body-trembling in the Great Egret.**—I observed an unusual feeding behavior of a Great Egret (*Egretta alba*) at Lake Eola, Orlando, Orange County, Florida between 19th December 1983 and 25th January 1984. It seemed to be the same bird each time and therefore could have been the one I found feeding on bread on 16th January 1984 at the same place (King, 1985 Fla. Field Nat. 13: 99).

The egret was extremely tame and thus allowed me to come within two or three meters without showing any degree of alarm, as it either fed along the water's edge or during roosting periods. By this close scrutiny I noticed when it was in high-expectation of obtaining some desirable food item, with its head and neck fully extended and body leaning forward, its whole body trembled or shivered momentarily. This was immediately followed by the egret plunging its bill into the shallow water to capture its prey. The body-trembling was so rapidly performed the phenomenon may easily have been missed by observers in the past.—**Bernard King** Gull Cry 9 Park Road, Newlyn, Penzance, TR18 5DZ, Cornwall, England.

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**Renestings of American Crows in Florida and predation by raccoons.**—I here report the repeated renestings of two cooperatively breeding (Kilham 1984) groups of American Crows (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*), A and B, observed in 1983, a year of excessive rainfall at the Hendrie ranch, 24 km south of Lake Placid, Highlands County, Florida. I have encountered no reports of repeated renestings of American Crows in Bent (1946), Good (1952) or other general accounts nor did I observe any in 4 of the 5 years (1981-85) that I followed crows at the ranch. Observations summarized in Figure 1 were aided by the tameness of the crows, a result of years of protection and the feeding of corn.

December 1982 was unusually warm and this may explain why female A was already incubating on 16 January 1983, the earliest of 16 nests I found in Florida. Incubation continued until 26 January when the nest failed for reasons unknown. Female A picked up sticks and showed other signs of renesting on the same morning. The crows of group A completed their second nest in 6 days, 3 days after the crows of group B completed their first one. These nests ended on 9 and 10 February when I found raccoons (*Procyon lotor*) sleeping in them. Both groups of crows renested, with the difference that while the B crows built a replacement nest, female A relaid in her second nest, 13 days after a raccoon had occupied it. This third attempt of the A crows failed on 4 March when I again found the nest occupied by a raccoon. The B crows had already lost their second nest 8 days before. In spite of these differences in dates, groups A and B completed new nests within 2 days of each other. These nestings, the third for group B and the fourth for group A, were successful to the extent that both contained nestlings 12-15 days old on 15 April. On 16 April nest B, which was poorly placed, developed a tilt and the nestlings fell to the ground.

American crows as observed at the ranch have nested in what are usually dry months of January to May, as shown in Figure 1 for 1985, a representative year. The winter of 1983 (the year of the El Niño event), in contrast, was unusual with its heavy rains and flooding. It was also unique among the crows at the ranch, in my 5 years of observations, in the extent of nest loss and replacement. In a somewhat parallel situation, Lawton et al (1985) noted the greatest variability in the breeding behavior of Brown Jays (*Cyanocorax morio*), in Costa Rica, in a year of unseasonal Atlantic storms.

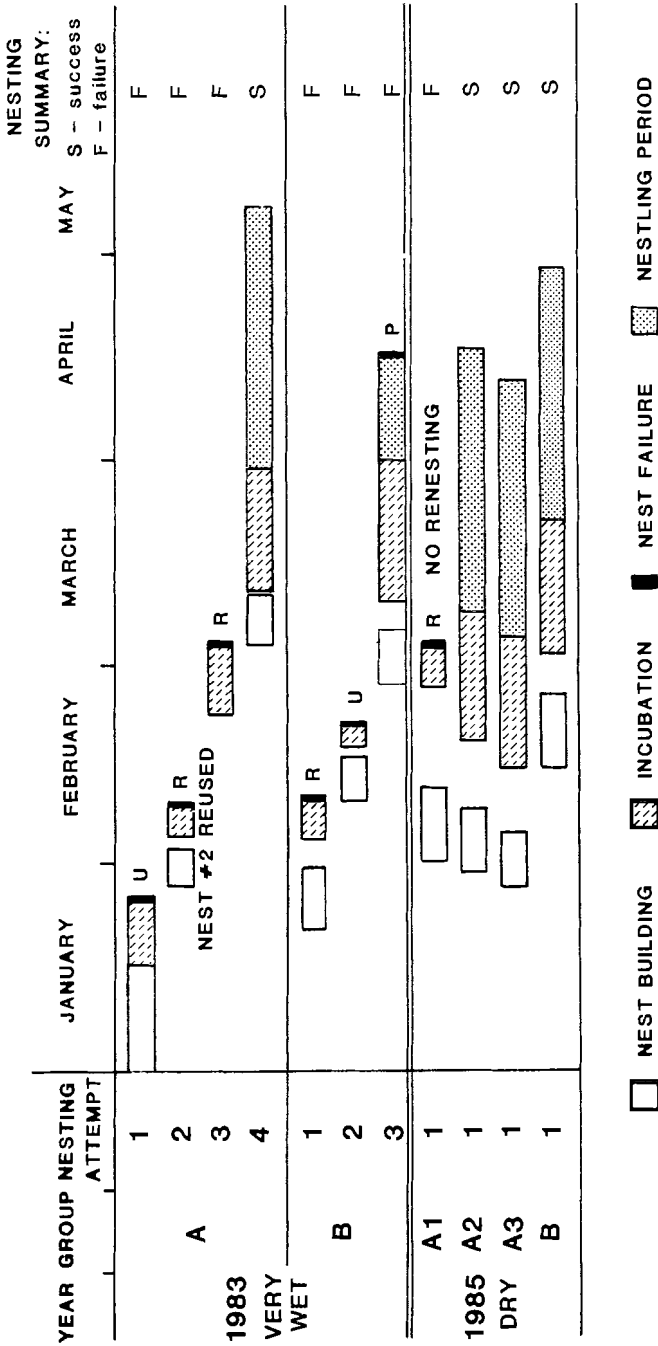


Figure 1. Results of repeated nesting attempts of two cooperatively breeding groups of crows, A and B, that had contiguous territories in the very wet year of 1983, and of A1, A2, A3 and B that nested in the same area in 1985, a dry year. Causes of the 7 nest failures in the 2 years were: R = raccoon (n = 4); U = unknown (n = 2); and P = nest poorly constructed (n = 1).

Three out of the six nest failures that led to renestings of crows in Florida in 1983 (Fig. 1) were due to raccoons. The widespread flooding dispersed these animals, leading, seemingly, to their finding crow nests more readily. In 1985, an unusually dry year, the only nest that failed was one taken over by a raccoon, the nest tree being the only one of four used by crows in that year that was growing in a wet place. Hearing a sudden cawing of crows on 1 March, the third day of incubation, I walked over to find the raccoon climbing the nest tree. The four crows of the group perched about the nest and two swooped at the predator that, seemingly undisturbed, came over the nest rim and, with head down for some minutes, appeared to be eating the eggs. The crows left after a minute and did not return. The raccoon curled up in the nest where, as with the three earlier nests I had noted, it was barely visible from the ground. These observations suggest that raccoons may be one of the commoner and more effective predators of crows's nests in Florida. Crows at the ranch appeared to have little protection against them other than placing their nests away from wet places.

Emlen (1942) found that American Crows sometimes relaid in 10-12 days in nests from which he had taken clutches and Butler et al (1984) in 13.6 days for nests of Northwestern Crows (*C. caurinus*) that had been abandoned or predated. Wittenberg (1968) noted Carrion Crows (*C. corone*) relaying in the same nest after failure in 6 of 76 first and in 5 of 16 second nestings. He did not observe any crows attempting to nest as many as four times in a year as I did in Florida.

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