



CORVUS MONEDULA, Linn.

CORVUS MONEDULA, Linn.

Jackdaw.

Corvus monedula, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 30.

Lycos monedula, Boie, Isis, 1828, p. 1273.

Coleus monedula, Kaup, Natürl. Syst., p. 114.

Monedula turrium, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., p. 172.

——— *arborea*, Brehm, ib., p. 173, tab. 12. fig. 2.

——— *septentrionalis*, Brehm, ib., p. 173.

Corvus collaris, Drumm.?

Of the true Corvine birds inhabiting the British Islands the Raven is the largest, and the most formidable, and is generally regarded as a bird of ill omen. The Carrion-Crow and its near ally, the Hooded, are among most persons scarcely more in favour, from the depredations they commit; the Rook, on the other hand, has commended himself to us by his social habits, while the Jackdaw and Chough are especial favourites with all.

To say that the Jackdaw is strictly indigenous to the British Islands, that it is gregarious, and that it associates with Rooks for the greater part of the year will not be adding to the information regarding it already recorded; yet such affirmations are necessary whenever the subject is treated of in an independent work. I have said that the Jackdaw is an especial favourite; and so he really is. If left unmolested, he has no natural shyness, and we feel no repugnance at his intrusion when he forces himself on our notice during the greater part of his life; for when he is not in the fields among the Rooks or in a little company of his own kind, he is enlivening with his presence the castellated towers of a royal palace, the minster of some cathedral town, the ivy-clad tower of a famed ruin, the gateway of an ancient abbey, or the more humble clock-tower of some of the many borough towns which exist from one end of our island to the other. To all such places he resorts at one or other time of the day, but more especially in the early morning and in the evening. It is true that some Daws spend the days of autumn and winter wholly with the Rooks, and return with them every evening to their roosting-place in the woods, as I noticed many did while making my observations on the vast assemblages of Rooks at Tregothnan, in Cornwall. The strings of these birds that came in from every point of the compass to the common centre of the great assembly were each accompanied by Jackdaws, which always betrayed their presence by their loquacious cackling. In the spring, however, a complete separation of the two birds takes place—a separation which, although remarkable, is in strict conformity with the different instincts, habits, and economy of the two species. I commenced this memoir with an enumeration of the British Corvine birds, and I will now add a few words on their nidification. The formidable Raven is the first to breed, its nest being formed in January or in the beginning of the ensuing month; the Crow is a little later; the Rook, when Valentine's day comes round, may be seen coquetting with his mate; the impulses of the Daw do not, however, prompt him to perform this duty so early, and it is fully a month later before he weds; and the pairs betake themselves, for the purpose of breeding, to belfries, towers, church-steeple, precipitous rocks on the sea-shore, pits of chalk, old gateways in towns, holes of pollard trees, or deserted rabbit- and fox-holes on the hillside. It is not until the beginning of April that they collect sticks and roots to make a platform for the future nest, and wool, old rags, or other soft materials to line it with. Now, however, they may be seen actively passing to and fro the whole day long. At this time, in some situations, the Jackdaw becomes more shy and wary than at any other season, and upon being disturbed quits the pit-side with the greatest haste, or bustles out of a hole in the ground with the utmost turbulence; a short flight, however, is all he takes, perhaps only to the top of the nearest poplar, where he quietly sits until danger is past, and then returns to finish his nest or complete any other task upon which he may have been engaged. Many are the accounts on record of the extraordinary amount of materials taken down some deserted chimney or deposited on the narrow staircase of a little-frequented belfry. Apparently the sole aim of the bird is to build on from time to time, and pile up from year to year sufficient to raise its nest to the mouth of the opening; and if left undisturbed for a number of years, it generally succeeds in accomplishing its object.

Mr. Wolley informed Mr. Hewitson that he saw the nest in the turret at Eton mentioned by Mr. Jesse in his 'Gleanings,' and that it was, he believes, raised no less than nine feet from the foundation. Taking its rise from two or three steps of the circular stairs, it was built up compactly, and of a nearly uniform breadth, to a lancet window in the perpendicular wall, the bottom of which window was not otherwise sufficiently wide to support a nest. Referring to the point in dispute, whether or not birds of the Crow

kind cover their eggs, Mr. Wolley says, "About ten days ago Henry Walter and myself amused ourselves by climbing up to Jackdaws' nests placed in holes in the trees about Bearwood, on the borders of Windsor Forest. In the course of three days we must have examined several scores of nests. On the first day none of the eggs were covered; but on the second and third days we found that several of the nests that had been visited before, now had their eggs either partially covered with loose pieces of wool, or the eggs in some cases were nearly buried in the woolly lining of the nest, and this whether the bird had just flown from the nest or not." (Hewitson's Col. Ill. of Eggs of Brit. Birds, 3rd edit. vol. i. pp. 232, 233.)

The eggs are four or five in number, of a regular oval form, and of a pale greenish blue, covered, particularly at the larger end, with round, distinct spots of dark brown and pale purplish brown; their length varies from one inch and a third to one inch and a half. They are laid in May, and the young are able to fly by the end of June.

Besides his love for the society of man, the popularity of the Jackdaw is enhanced by its graceful and buoyant flight round and about church and other towers, its loquacious cackling, the readiness with which it becomes domesticated, its powers of imitating the human voice, and its droll and comical ways; while in the sheep-walk he is no less interesting for the inquisitive manner with which he probes the close-cropped turf before the nose of the sheep, and perches on their backs with the utmost complacency.

There is but little difference in the colouring of the sexes when adult. The young have no trace of the hoary hind head until after the first moult; but as they increase in age the crown becomes of a steel-blue, the hinder part of the head and neck hoary; and the irides during the first autumn are generally of a dark brown, which ultimately gives place to pearly white. To describe the body-feathers as black would be incorrect; for, like those of the Rook and the Chough, they display a considerable diversity of colour as the rays of light impinge upon the various parts of the body.

As a feeder, the Jackdaw may be said to be omnivorous; for he disdains not to eat carrion, insects, grubs, worms, shelled mollusks, and crustaceans; to which are added grain, seeds, and fruits, eggs, and even weakly birds.

As regards distribution, if the Jackdaw of Macedonia (*Corvus collaris*, Drumm.) be regarded as a mere local variety, then the present bird ranges over central Europe (as far north as nearly to the 65th degree of latitude), the islands of the Mediterranean, North Africa, Cashmere, and Amoorland.

The *Corvus monedula* and its near allies, the *C. dauricus* and *C. neglectus*, form a small section of the family *Corvidæ*, to which the generic appellations of *Lycos*, *Monedula*, and *Colæus* have been assigned by various authors, with the present bird as the type: in a general work on ornithology I should have adopted this view, and figured the bird as *Lycos monedula*; but here I have thought it advisable to retain it under the old name of *Corvus*.

A history of the Jackdaw would be incomplete without some reference to its capability of domestication, and its thievish propensities; both of which points are well illustrated in the following article from the pen of Mr. John Denson, senior, which appeared in the sixth volume of 'Loudon's Magazine of Natural History.'

"Doubtless it is well known that the Jackdaw can be domesticated. He frequently is; and a playful, merry, mischievous little fellow he becomes. One that came into my possession as soon as it was hatched, I kept for more than twelve months. It soon became the favourite of the family, and when able to fly, would follow me or any of the household into the garden or anywhere near the house. Many a time has he perched on my shoulder and amused himself by preening the side of my head, and sometimes giving me a nip on the ear; and then he would call out 'Jack!' lustily, put his powdered head knowingly on one side, and look in my face as if to see how I liked it. The garden was his general haunt; there he would amuse himself for hours looking for insects. Earwigs and spiders were his favourite food. I recollect his leaving my shoulder and pouncing upon a large spider and its white bag of eggs. The Jackdaws from the tower of the village church frequently flew round in circles, and seemed by their calls to invite him to join their society; but Jack could not be persuaded to leave his abode. Still, although he made our house and outbuildings his home, he was not against visiting his neighbours. Many a thimble, portion of thread, a spoon in one or more instances, or anything that was portable, has he purloined from the neighbouring cottages, and concealed under the moss that grew on the thatch of the barn. Jack by this means got a very ill name, and if any little thing was missing he was sure to be accused. The ladder has been raised, his hoard searched, and the lost goods returned. Jack was a very early riser, and would imitate the human voice. After a while I lost sight of him, and heard some years afterwards that his thievish and mischievous propensities had brought him to an untimely end."

The figures in the accompanying Plate represent the two sexes of the natural size. The plant is the common Ivy, *Hedera Helix*, Linn.



Gould, John. 1873. "Jackdaw, *Corvus monedula* [Pl. 61]." *The birds of Great Britain* 3, -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.323949>.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/221726>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.323949>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/323949>

Holding Institution

Smithsonian Libraries and Archives

Sponsored by

Biodiversity Heritage Library

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: Public domain. The BHL considers that this work is no longer under copyright protection.

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.