

# Common Raven, *Corvus corax*, Caching Food in Snow

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A Common Raven (*Corvus corax*) when alone, buried a heavy scrap of bone plus fat in snow, then covered it over with sweeping motions of its bill. Other presumed raven caches were found nearby.

Key Words: Common Raven, *Corvus corax*, caching, New Hampshire.

Although Bent (1946), Turcek and Kelso (1968), and Knight and Call (1980) mention Common Ravens, *Corvus corax*, storing food, and both Gwinner (1965) and Kilham (in press) have made repeated observations of their doing so in captivity, I have encountered no detailed reports of their storing food in the wild, other than one by Simmons (1970) of a raven storing food in Tunisia, and none of storing food in snow. The following observations of a raven caching food in snow were made on a farm in Lyme, New Hampshire, where I started a feeding station in November 1985. Five American Crows, *Corvus brachyrhynchos*, and a pair of ravens that always came from the north were regular visitors. Late on the morning of 17 December a single raven, one that left to the south, was present. It flew with a sizeable item in its bill for 25 m, then dropped into 18 cm of powder snow. Without moving from where it landed, it tossed snow with sweeping motions of its bill. After working for a minute with its head in the hole it flew away. On inspection I found a basin shaped depression the size of the raven's body. After scraping away 5 cm of snow I uncovered a scrap of bone and suet 6-7 cm in diameter.

A single raven, I believe the same one for it flew on the same course to the south, was alone at the feeding station on the following morning. This time it flew to a depression 15 m away where it put its head down, held its bill up as if eating something, then flew to a second raven-sized depression farther on. It worked here for a minute, then left. I found nothing in the first depression and a slab of ribs, meat and suet covered with snow in the second one. The slab measured roughly 12 × 19 × 3 cm. Fresh snow had fallen three days before and I could see, by an absence of tracks, that no bird or mammal had come within 10-15 m of any of the depressions. The items stored were larger and heavier than anything than I have observed being carried by crows.

Lorenz (1970), in observations on the food storing of four species of hand-raised corvids, noted that only ravens took care not to be seen by conspecifics or other animals when hiding food. The raven that I observed caching food was unusual in being at the feeding station alone. It is

conceivable that wild ravens cache food more often than is commonly realized, but being circumspect in the way they do it, are more difficult to observe than American Crows (Kilham 1984, 1985). The habit of storing food is common in corvids (Goodwin 1976), but only the Black-billed Magpie, *Pica pica*, (Summers-Smith 1984) and the American Crow (Kilham, in press) have hitherto been reported caching food in snow, both species poking it in with the bill.

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