

Crows

Since living here at Orlandon Kilns we have been used to living with a pair of Crows somewhere in the vicinity. We would see them having dogfights with the local Buzzards when the Buzzards dared to fly over their territory. We would regularly see them sitting at the top of a tree proclaiming their territory and cawing raucously and loudly - "Caww! Caww! Caww!" And see them sitting on or near their nest in an isolated tree in a hedge-line about 200 yards away.



Every so often, one Crow would land on one of the two tall pine trees in our garden and survey the area – they love to perch up high and look around, and the top of these trees provides an excellent view. We always wondered if they might one day nest in one of these pine trees and this year it happened. Out of the corner of our eye we began to notice furtive Crow visits into the top of the left hand pine tree – they would always fly in from the far side and were completely silent. We could not see a nest – it appeared to be high up and the needles were too dense but the behaviour indicated that it was there. For several weeks we saw regular silent and unobtrusive visits. We then went away for a week or so. When we returned – no Crows. Well, the nest may have failed or juveniles may have fledged – but there is no sign of any Crows at all at the moment. Where are they?

But how to identify a Crow (or Carrion Crow to give it its full name)? Well, the saying “a crow in a crowd is a rook and a rook on its own is a crow” is a useful guide, as Crows usually hang around as a pair or a family group, whereas Rooks can often be seen in very large flocks feeding in fields. But if the food source is good then a few Crows may join the Rooks, along with Jackdaws and Starlings. And after storms on the beach at the Gann you can often see big numbers of Crows feeding on whatever has been washed up from the seabed. So better to look at the plumage – Crows are all black and have black beaks whereas Rooks have very pointy pale grey beaks, with a pale grey area of skin as the base of the bill. (But not juvenile Rooks, who look quite a lot like Crows!) Crows are neatly plumaged and smooth whereas Rooks have shaggy feathers at the top of their legs that look like baggy shorts! They also look different in flight – rooks have splayed wingtips while the Carrion Crow has solid, rounded wingtips.



Where this description of Crows falls down is with the Hooded Crow. Currently considered the same species as the Carrion Crow, this looks quite different with a black head, wings and tail, but a grey body. In the British Isles they only live in some parts of Scotland and in Ireland, but can sometimes be seen in other places, including Pembrokeshire where the occasional bird can be seen from time to time. Every year there is usually a bird around somewhere - most recently at Kensington near St Brides on 13th May. It is probably an Irish immigrant!

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