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## Book Review of *In the Company of Crows and Ravens* by John M. Marzluff and Tony Angell

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**In the Company of Crows and Ravens.** By John M. Marzluff and Tony Angell. New Haven: Yale University Press. 2005. xix + 384 pp. Illustrations, notes, references, index. \$30.00 cloth.

This is an aptly titled book that deals in a fascinating manner with the biological and cultural intersections that have occurred between humans and the crow-like birds (*Corvus* spp.) throughout history. Today, even city dwellers are likely to have had some contacts with crows, as these crafty birds have increasingly been able to adapt to the complex world of city life in recent decades. As a youngster I knew crows only as highly elusive countryside birds, and I was constantly frustrated in my attempts to stalk them with my .22 rifle and collect a 25-cent bounty. Later, while doing field studies in Grand Teton National Park, I was similarly outwitted by hungry ravens when I tried to put out meat baits unobserved to attract and photograph wild pine martens. Only on reading this book did I suddenly realize that the word ravenous was derived from the substantial appetites of ravens.

These two corvine features, alertness and intelligence, are described by Marzluff and Angell in great detail, drawing from ancient myths and legends as well as from present-day behavioral research, all through the prism of bird-human interactions. There are hundreds of examples of these, such as Japanese crows learning to place thick-shelled nuts in the paths of motor vehicles to have them cracked open, or New Caledonian crows learning to bend scrap wires enough to make hooked tools for fishing insects out of crevices. Accompanying these accounts are

more than a hundred wonderful scratchboard drawings by Tony Angel, a master of this demanding technique.

In listing the many remarkable attributes of these birds, the authors mention that crows and ravens may be able to detect ultraviolet light. I was thus disappointed that they described the birds' plumages as merely "black or glossy black." On examining various Nebraska birds under ultraviolet light a few years ago, I was amazed at the visual transformation of a crow into a stunning creature shimmering with a violet iridescence that reminded me of some birds of paradise. It made me realize that our human visual abilities are sometimes pitifully inadequate to appreciate the real beauty of our often seemingly mundane natural world.

I was impressed by the broad coverage of this remarkably interesting book, which lists nearly 500 references, has 18 pages of endnotes, and even includes a list of more than 50 children's books involving crows and ravens. It's a volume well worth anyone's time. **Paul A. Johnsgard**, *School of Biological Sciences, University of Nebraska–Lincoln*.