

AMERICAN CROW PREDATION IN AN EARED GREBE NESTING COLONY AT RAWLINGS LAKE, BRITISH COLUMBIA

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It is widely known that the American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) is an opportunistic omnivore whose seasonal diet includes the eggs of many species of terrestrial and aquatic birds (Bent 1937, Kalmbach 1939, Verbeek and Caffrey 2002). Predation at grebe colonies by crows has been documented by Stout and Nuechterlein (1999) for the Red-necked Grebe (*Podiceps grisegena*) and Storer and Nuechterlein (1992) for the Western Grebe (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*), but I could not find specific reference to predation on Eared Grebe (*Podiceps nigricollis*) eggs (Cullen et al. 1999).

During May 2005 about 100 pairs of Eared Grebes had built nests near the west end of Rawlings Lake, located 6 km east of Lumby in the north Okanagan valley, British Columbia. The lake, about 300 m long by 100 m wide, is situated in hay fields on privately owned land about 1 km north of Highway 6. For many years the lake has been the site of a nesting colony of Eared Grebes that has fluctuated between 50 and 200 pairs.

On 5 June 2005, at 0900 hrs, I parked the car on the edge of Rawlings Lake Road to count the number of Eared Grebe nests with attendant adults. Immediately, I heard young American Crows begging from a Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) dominated forest to the west of the road. An adult crow flew from the forest and straight toward the lake. It flew about 6 m above the colony of Eared Grebes until it reached a point about two-thirds of the way through, then suddenly swooped onto a nest. The incubating grebe scrambled into the water and the crow carefully picked up an egg and returned to the forest the way it had come. The crow flew into the Douglas-firs behind me where the volume of cawing increased, suggesting it was feeding its young. Almost immediately a second adult crow followed the same routine, flying to the colony, possibly even the same nest, seizing an egg and returning to the

same site in the forest.

Over the next five minutes the adult crows made eight separate feeding forays, always flying to the same general area of the grebe colony. The arrival of each crow in the colony was signaled by an increase in the rate and volume of vocalizing by the Eared Grebes. The crows acted independently, never raiding the colony at the same time. Each adult crow took a total of four eggs. Both crows would alternate bringing an egg back to the forest and hiding an egg in long grasses along the lakeshore. Each crow cached two eggs.

Unfortunately, I had to leave Rawlings Lake at 0910 hrs so I was unable to monitor further predation.

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