

# The Trees Have Bedrooms

<http://archive.vancourier.com/issues03/033103/news/033103nn1.html>

The above is a link to an archived on-line article from the *Vancouver Courier* in 2003 that explores that burning question that has been keeping all of us awake at night: where do the crows in my neighbourhood go to sleep at night?

Okay, maybe it hasn't been causing insomnia for you, but for several years, Gord and I have been aware that thousands of crows in Vancouver, Burnaby and the North Shore all travel various calorie-burning distances each night to roost together on the boundary between Vancouver and Burnaby. If you've looked up in the sky, towards day's end throughout the year, you may have seen crows ganging up in your neighbourhood and setting off in that general direction. If you felt like you were seeing something from a Hitchcock movie, you're not alone, according to the *Courier* article. When those



*Rob Raguso, 1995, University of Michigan*

black birds start to zone in on their roosting area, the sky is darkened with flocks in the hundreds and thousands that stream together, like airborne schools of fish.

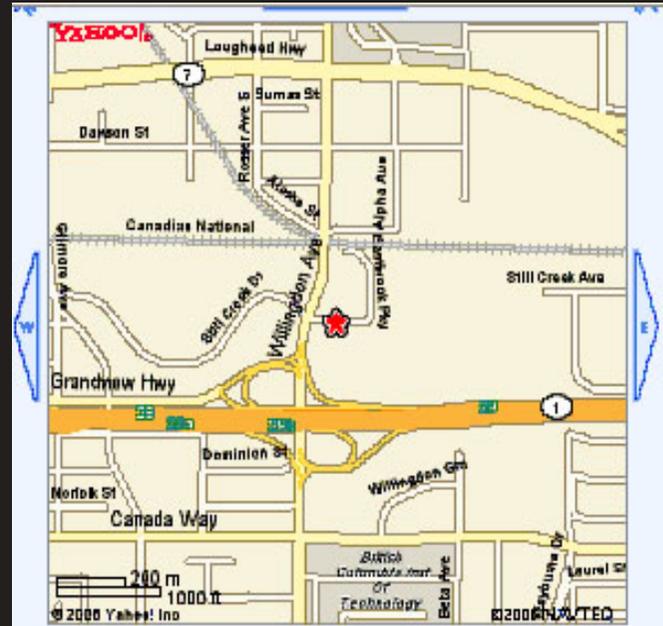
Tonight, we headed eastward, driving beneath some of the east-bound crow flocks headed for the nightly roost, and prowled around to see what we could see. Gord always thought the huge flock of crows were roosted by the movie industry sound stages built at Boundary by the Lougheed Highway.

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Tonight, though, we found they are congregating a little east and south of there, in the area described in the Courier article, which is around Still Creek in Burnaby.

We headed east on Still Creek Drive, which winds through an industrial park, and thousands of crows were flapping about in the area, landing on the roofs of buildings and in the trees. We crossed busy Willingdon Avenue, and got out of the car on Dawson, closer to the Lougheed Highway, where for blocks into the distance, hundreds of black birds festooned the telephone wires like 16th notes on a sheet of very difficult piano music. As it grew darker, we thought at first the crows were abandoning the wires and the road area because of our being there, and Gord's attempts at photographs. Soon we realized they were all moving into the wooded areas away from cars, lights and people. We walked to the south end of Alpha Avenue at Alaska, following the cawing and ruckus in the trees, only turning back at signs of a homeless encampment in the deserted area. Back in the car, we went down to the south foot of Beta and were rewarded with a huge flight of crows coming westward overhead in a flock so dense we could hear their wingbeats.

It was obvious by then the crows were heading into secluded woods where we could not go, so we drove west, back to Still Creek Avenue, to see if there were any remaining in the area where we had previously seen so many atop the buildings. There, we found a strange and sad scenario, behind the large eBay building in which people were visibly working away on the 24-hour-a-day enterprise that is web-based purchasing. Still Creek ravine and the trees that surround it are squeezed into the narrow



cleft where the industrial parks could not build any lower into the cut. From out in the brightly lit parking lot behind the building, overlooking the creek, we could see large numbers of crows still flying in to join the many already in the trees. There was a lot of commotion and flapping between trees behind the eBay building and those in the ravine. Then, we heard loud eagle calls and I cried, “Oh no, there’s an eagle here, attacking the crows!” Flapping crows, loud predator calls, it sounded like mayhem in the making.

As it turns out, eBay (or their neighbours) are actually trying to scare the crows away from the building and from the trees along the back of the large complex. Of limited efficacy, the net effect is, all those thousands of crows who have nowhere else to go in their shrinking Still Creek roost are in a hubbub at their bedtime, when they are trying to settle for the night. Eagle broadcasts reverberate behind the development, filling the ravine with this noise, intended as the opposite to a crow lullaby. These trees are crow bedrooms. As we drove westward leaving the area, we continued to hear the artificial eagles, from blocks away.

At the end of the day, this outing did not feel like a birding affair, so much as witnessing one of the splendid displays of natural forces remaining in an urban area—forces disturbed and displaced by the continuing encroachment of people, but not quenched by them. Like the New Yorker article of several years ago explaining that “Weeds Are Us”, crows certainly

are “us”, also. They may manage quite well in a more natural setting, but they don’t do too badly on our streets and in our gardens, do they?

Let’s close here, with a picture of an unfledged baby crow (“Crawford”) we met on the Sunshine Coast several years ago—a memorable close encounter with an intelligent and sensitive creature. 🦉

