

PRIOR TO PROTECTIVE LAWS, CROWS WERE AT MERCY OF CURIOUS BOYS

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I am frequently asked, "How do you come up with topics for your column each week?" Believe me, it is not easy. In fact, I consider it the hardest part in continuing to keep up with the task. This week's was one of the thorniest I have had in the five years I have been writing. It is not exactly plagiarism, but credit friend Gary Lee with the inspiration for this one.

In his column last week, Gary urged everyone to leave fawns that they may encounter alone. It is good advice that is all too often ignored. The same is true of many other species of wildlife young. It is advice, I am sorry to say, I was not aware of when I was a youngster growing up. I picked up every stray that happened across my path and went out of my way to save others from the perils of the wild.

In those days we were not afforded the benefit of today's nature programs like the Discovery and Animal Planet TV series or naturalists like Gary. If I had been, I am sure various wildlife would have been spared my kindly ministrations. In my defense, I was a kind benefactor with the best of intentions, albeit ill formed.

At present much of my time is spent teaching my two grandsons, Forrest and Tecwyn, six and four respectively, how wildlife is best to be enjoyed. I want them to indulge their natural curiosity without causing undue stress on the local snakes, frogs, newts, and other wildlife denizens.

The fox was the most fortunate recipient of my misguided intentions. At the time, their abundance and unsavory reputation contributed to some extent to my transgressions against them. There was a six-dollar bounty on them, but I never availed myself of it. I kept them strictly as pets, a role the females fulfilled ably in contrast to their brothers. They would sooner bite you than look at you. I passed some on to my friends for the same purpose. Invariably they found their way back to the wild due to their initiative as Houdini's or my father's insistence. Their transition back to the wild is perhaps the most flawless of any wild animal.

Crows were also targets of my zeal as an animal tamer. They make great and interesting pets. My mother short-circuited those endeavors after only two episodes.

One crow delighted in walking along the clothes line either pulling the pins and sending them cascading to the ground or fouling them in an even more disgusting manner.

The one that persisted in terrorizing my little sister locked it for good. It would land on her head and tweak her ear in a none-too-gentle manner. Other than those and other little tricks, if you have a good sense of humor, crows make good pets.

Both species are now protected by New York State law and they are prohibited from being held as pets along with most other wild animals and birds. Unless the animal in question is in immediate danger, leave it alone and consult a wildlife agent or other law officer. Special animal rehabilitators licensed by the State are available to aid distressed wildlife.

I encourage my grandchildren to study and examine wild animals in a considered and humane manner and then leave them alone.

There are plenty of domesticated animals that make good pets and serve to teach youngsters respect and responsibility for their care.