

Letter from the Editor

"Prophet"

"Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil! — prophet still, if bird or devil! —
Whether Tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here ashore,
Desolate yet all undaunted, on this desert land enchanted —
On this home by Horror haunted — tell me truly, I implore —
Is there — is there balm in Gilead? — tell me — tell me, I implore!"
Quoth the Raven "Nevermore."

—Edgar Allan Poe, 1809–1849



The above paragraph is taken from "The Raven," a poem written by Edgar Allan Poe in 1845. The poem is about a man grieving over a lost love that is tormented by a raven tapping at his door

at midnight. Thinking there is a visitor at his door, he opens a window to tell the visitor to leave, and in doing so, a raven flies into the room.

Initially, he is amused with the raven. But the novelty rapidly wears off as the raven begins to wear on his psyche. The rhythmic and repetitive nature of the poem captures the growing hopelessness of the man's predicament. The raven's response of "nevermore" to the man's questioning convinces him he will never find relief for his agony and thus, gradually feels pleasure from focusing his loss.

Scholars have debated the meaning of poem. Some suggest Poe never intended to portray human agony or internal conflict in writing poem; he merely intended to entertain.

In this special topic issue of *Human–Wildlife Interactions*, we feature 22 papers that explore the science, realities, and consequences of managing a native North American species to ensure the conservation of other native species whose populations are in peril. The authors universally concluded that common ravens (*Corvus corax*), as generalist predators, pose a threat to the continued existence of several rare native wildlife species in the western United States. This threat has been magnified by recent increases in raven populations. Raven population increases and range expansion have been fueled by increased human subsidies—notably food, water, and nest sites.

This is particularly concerning to managers seeking to conserve rare species. As human populations increase, so does the per capita demand for natural resources, and with it the associated human subsidies. Because managers face immense challenges in addressing issues related to reducing or eliminating wide-spread subsidies, they increasingly rely on lethal removal of ravens.

Lethal removal of ravens can enhance the reproduction of the impacted rare species. But lethal removal is a short-term solution to a problem that will continue to grow until the issue of human subsidies are addressed. Because ravens can track anthropogenic resources across wide landscapes, the removal of subsidies in an area can also contribute to continental shifts in raven abundance, which in turn may impact other sensitive native wildlife species.

I selected this particular stanza of the poem to preface my comments because of the phrase "Desolate yet all undaunted, on this desert land enchanted" and Poe's use of the word "Prophet" to describe the raven. The phrase aptly describes the dynamic western ecosystem. The raven, as a Prophet, foreshadows humanity's failure to anticipate and plan for the consequence's development. Ravens as just doing what they are programmed to do—survive!

Like the poem, contemporary management of ravens for conservation purposes is complex and conflicting. Resolution will require new and innovative approaches not just to reducing humansubsidies that support raven colonization of new landscapes, but to mitigate the impacts of anthropogenic growth on all native wildlife.

Terry A. Messmer, Editor-in-Chief
