That is why

Why do crows remember faces?

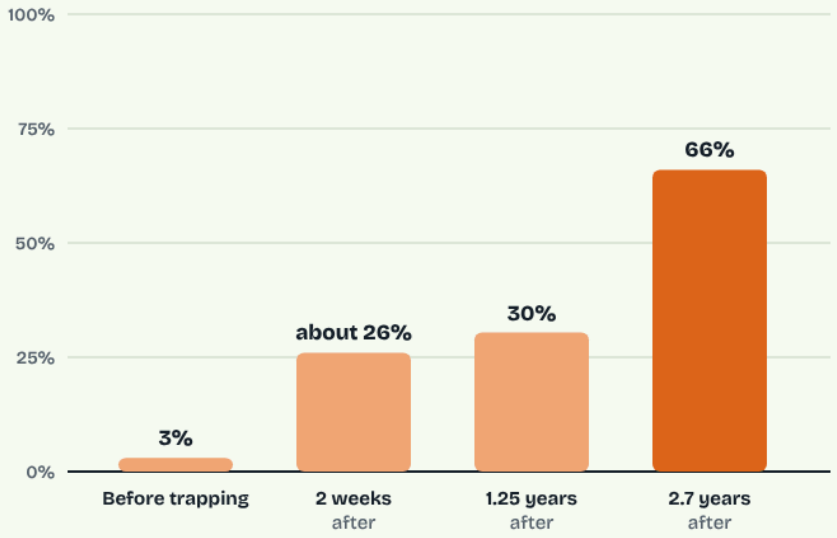
One bad encounter ties a face to danger, and the warning spreads to crows that were never trapped.

A One bad day, years of scolding

Researchers in a "dangerous" mask trapped 7 to 15 crows at each of 5 sites near Seattle, then let them go.



Share of crows on campus scolding the dangerous mask



Trapped crows scolded the dangerous mask in 21 of 23 encounters, and a neutral mask in only 2 of 18.

A mask dangerous at one site was neutral at the others: history, not the mask.

B Inside the crow's brain

12 wild adult male crows saw two faces during brain scans.



Threatening face

worn by the trappers

Lights up regions for emotion and conditioned fear: amygdala-like, thalamus, brainstem.

The crow freezes and stares.



Caring face

fed them for 4 weeks

Lights up motivation circuits instead. Keepers become valued social partners, not threats.

A face is filed as danger or care.

C How the warning spreads

1 Strangers join in

86.9% of 160 scolding crows had never been trapped by the masked people.

2 It travels

The warning spread at least 1.2 km in 5 years.

3 Chicks learn it

Young crows in 7 of 11 territories scolded the mask; only 1 of 9 scolded a person without one.

Learning from others: social learning

One bad day, and the whole roost knows your face.

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