

## Jackdaws

Jackdaws are like Starlings – they are a bird that you always think of in the plural. And perhaps even more so this year – a Dale resident mentioned to me the other day that here seemed to be a lot of Jackdaws about, with big flocks swirling in the air in the fashion of Starlings. It is certainly true that there are a lot of Jackdaws in Dale, and I have often wondered where they all breed. Few of the trees are old enough to have big holes suitable for a Jackdaw nest, so do they all nest in chimneys? I don't think so – there don't seem to be enough to go round and indeed many households have a variety of “discouragements” on their chimneys against Jackdaw entry! I think they must nest in old rook nests, of which there are many in Dale, though my favourite bird reference website implies they do this only rarely.



Jackdaws do habitually associate with Rooks – sometimes the mixed “Chack” of Jackdaws (which is the origin of their name) and the “Caw” of rooks can be deafening in Blue Anchor Way in the early summer. They also roost together. When we lived in West Berkshire there was a roost site in the trees close to our house. In the late summer, just as it got dark, a huge and apparently unending flock of up to 5,000 mixed Rooks and Jackdaws would fly low over the house for about 5 minutes and into the roost trees. The noise of their wings was most impressive and they interfered with the television reception!

Jackdaws are typically seen strutting around on the ground casting their white eyes around for anything that might be edible. The young birds have dark eyes and are mostly black – only the adults have the striking white eye and grey cowl around the back of the neck. The juveniles also have a misleading Chough-like “cheeaow” call so if you think you hear a Chough on a roof in Dale, it probably isn't!

Jackdaws nest semi-colonially and pair for life, and in their social groupings they have a clear pecking order (literally). Jackdaws are also famous for making excellent pets – because of their habit of nesting in and around dwellings, young birds are quite often found on the ground in gardens or in the house. These birds can be raised as pets and they become devoted to their keeper.

Jackdaws are also much associated with church towers. The 18th-century poet William Cowper wrote, ‘A great frequenter of the church, Where bishop-like, he finds a perch And dormitory too.’ For this habit, the bird was apparently deemed sacred in parts of Wales.

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