

The News Journal



Courtesy of Steven Kendus

When faced without a major crow roost on hunting land, put out an owl decoy, then make some crow calls and watch the birds arrive soon after. Be sure to move around, as crows are intelligent and will alter flight patterns.

Delaware awash in crows, but hunting them takes skill

It's no joke, crows are fair game.

Little gets a more bewildered and disbelieving response than mentioning crow hunting. Hunters and non-hunters alike usually reply with the standard question, "You hunt what?"

Granted, when I was first invited to hunt crows, I laughed and thought the same thing.



STEVEN
KENDUS
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Crows? Are you kidding me? Who the heck hunts crows? Why would anyone want to hunt crows? That's like shooting fish in a barrel.

Boy, did I have the wrong impression.

After shooting two boxes of shells (50 shots) during my first crow hunt and only having a few crows to show for it, I was the one being laughed at. That lesson in humility reinforced that—like all hunting—there is a science to crow hunting.

Understanding how to hunt crows begins with understanding their habits and behavior. The American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*), found throughout Delaware, prefers

to nest in tall, sheltered trees near open areas, and they normally live in family groups that establish and defend large territories. These family groups, consisting of crows of various ages, are frequently observed feeding together or swarming predators, like hawks and owls.

During the fall and winter, many crow family groups fly from their normal territories each evening to a communal roost location. The communal crow roosts, which can host hundreds to tens of thousands of crows each night, provide the crows with sheltered sleeping areas that offer them some protection from predators.

Delaware's crow hunting season is usually open for about nine consecutive months—approximately from the beginning of July through the end of March—with only the typical spring breeding season off limits. I typically reserve my crow hunting for February and March, when I can set up near a communal roost location, or for early fall, when I can sharpen my wingshooting skills for the upcoming waterfowl and small game seasons.

If you cannot find a major crow roost on land where you have permission to hunt, you

can always use the crows' territorial and defensive nature to lure them in. After finding some potential hunting locations near crow family groups, find an easily recognizable stump, fencepost, or some other object where you can set an owl decoy. Set up the owl decoy, add a few crow decoys and some calling, and wait for the crows to arrive. Any crows within visible range will be drawn toward the owl, and you should be presented with some fine shooting.

Keep in mind that crows are intelligent, strong, high-flying birds, and they are far from easy to hunt. When crow hunting, use quality, long-range shotgun loads, and change your hunting locations frequently. Setting up in the same location on consecutive days will educate the crows and cause them to alter their flight patterns.

By the way, for those of you who are wondering, people really do eat crow. A quick Web search returns a fair number of crow recipes.

Bon appetit.

Steven Kendus' *Hunter's Journal* appears monthly in *The News Journal*. Kendus is the author of "Hunting The First State: A Guide to Delaware Hunting." Follow his blog and podcast at www.eastcoasthunting.blogspot.com. Contact him at skendus@HuntingTheFirstState.com.