# Hooded crows swoop near Belfast courts in defensive nesting season display



Hooded crows have become a notable presence near Belfast’s law courts, where their behaviour has elicited both curiosity and concern. Recently, these birds have been observed swooping down on passersby, acting defensively to protect their nests. This behaviour, commonly referred to as “mobbing,” is a tactic employed by many bird species during the nesting season to deter perceived threats from the vicinity of their young.

Ecologist Conor McKinney from Starling Ecology has shed light on this behaviour, emphasising that it is especially prevalent around this time of year when crows are likely to have eggs in their nests or even active nestlings. According to McKinney, such aggressive displays are typically defensive, aimed at warning off potential predators. “In a bird’s eye, the likes of ourselves could be recognised as a predator in the vicinity of a nest,” he stated. The crows use these tactics not to inflict harm but primarily to intimidate intruders, with most retreating once the perceived threat moves away.

The presence of hooded crows in urban environments is increasingly common, as they have adapted to city life. According to various studies, these birds exhibit remarkable flexibility, nesting in less favourable locations when traditional sites become scarce. Their penchant for urban areas may stem from the abundance of food and nesting resources found within cities. During a recent survey, nearly 1,000 different species were recorded in Belfast, underscoring the city's rich biodiversity, of which the hooded crow is a vital part.

However, hooded crows are also implicated in negative ecological interactions. For instance, their predation on the nests of other species, such as black guillemots in Bangor Harbour, has raised concerns. Dr. Julian Greenwood, a researcher who has studied guillemots for over three decades, noted the profound impact crows have had on guillemot populations, leading to severe declines in their brood due to egg and chick predation. This aspect of their behaviour highlights the complex role hooded crows play within the ecosystem, acting as both protector of their own young and a predator to other species.

Furthermore, their nesting habits reflect both their adaptability and intelligence. Hooded crows typically construct bulky nests in tall trees but have also been known to utilise old buildings and even urban infrastructure as nesting sites. This adaptability is a testament to their resilience and resourcefulness, allowing them to thrive in environments that may seem inhospitable to other species.

The interaction between wildlife and urban spaces can occasionally lead to conflict, as exemplified by the crows’ recent behaviour towards passersby. Nevertheless, McKinney advocates for a coexistence that respects wildlife. He emphasised the enrichment that urban biodiversity affords, encouraging residents to appreciate the wildlife that shares their spaces rather than viewing it solely as a nuisance.

In an era of declining natural habitats, the presence of species like the hooded crow serves as a reminder of the intricate relationships that exist between urban environments and the wildlife that inhabit them. The efforts to understand and protect these dynamic interactions could ensure that future generations of both humans and wildlife can flourish together in cities like Belfast.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1-2
2. Paragraphs 3-4
3. Paragraph 5
4. Paragraph 6
5. Paragraphs 7-8

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/crows-swoop-on-unsuspecting-passersby-to-protect-nests-near-belfast-courts-KROY52LKYRBVZGXEI733ENJLDU/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/crows-swoop-on-unsuspecting-passersby-to-protect-nests-near-belfast-courts-KROY52LKYRBVZGXEI733ENJLDU/> - An article from The Irish News reports that hooded crows near Belfast's city centre courts have been observed swooping on passersby to protect their nests. Ecologist Conor McKinney explains that this 'mobbing' behavior is a defensive tactic, common among birds during the nesting season. He notes that such behavior is often used to scare away predators and is triggered by proximity to the nest. The article also mentions that birds and their nests are protected by law in Northern Ireland, preventing intentional disturbance or harm.
3. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-14188905> - A BBC News article discusses the impact of hooded crows on black guillemot populations in Bangor Harbour. The crows have been observed stealing eggs and chicks from the guillemot nesting holes, leading to a significant decline in the guillemot brood. Dr. Julian Greenwood, who has studied black guillemots in Bangor for over 30 years, notes that this year has seen an extraordinary impact, with a virtual wipe-out of the guillemot brood due to the crows' predation.
4. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4722061/> - A study published in Acta Ethologica examines sexual aggression by intruders in hooded crows. The research, conducted in a protected flooded area, monitored nests with video cameras and recorded two separate incidents where intruders attacked a female at the nest. The study suggests that the female remained in the nest to prevent the strangers from cannibalizing the nestlings by mantling over the brood. The observed behavior is interpreted as intraspecific sexual aggression, where non-breeding males mounted an immobilized female.
5. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hooded_crow> - The Wikipedia page on the hooded crow provides comprehensive information about the species, including its behavior, diet, and nesting habits. It notes that hooded crows are omnivorous and scavengers, feeding on a variety of foods including small mammals, birds, and carrion. The page also details their nesting habits, mentioning that they typically build bulky stick nests in tall trees, but may also use cliff ledges, old buildings, and pylons. The typical lifespan is unknown, but the maximum recorded age for a hooded crow is 16 years and 9 months.
6. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8614296/> - A systematic global literature review published in the journal 'Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution' examines the presence and behavior of corvids, including hooded crows, in urban environments. The review highlights that hooded crows adapt to urban settings by nesting on non-preferred tree species and at lower heights as urban populations increase and preferred nesting sites become scarce. The study suggests that access to better nesting and feeding resources in cities often translates into shifts in reproductive behaviors.
7. <https://www.oiseaux-birds.com/card-hooded-crow.html> - An article from Oiseaux-Birds.com provides detailed information about the hooded crow, including its behavior, diet, and nesting habits. It notes that the hooded crow is monogamous with long-term pair bonds, and both mates often remain together all year round. The article also discusses their nesting habits, mentioning that the bulky stick nest is normally placed in a tall tree, but cliff ledges, old buildings, and pylons may also be used. The female lays 4-5 pale blue eggs with dark markings, which are incubated for 17-20 days.