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## Ravens stick-gathering at a potential nesting site within the Glasgow city boundaries

John Mitchell

22 Muirpark Way, Drymen, G63 0DX

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The hostility often shown towards ravens *Corvus corax* L. because of their alleged destructiveness towards new-born lambs and young game birds has a long history, the persecution of the birds becoming particularly effective following the development of modern firearms in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. From being a once common species in both town and country, the raven became restricted to the remoter hills and mountains. In more modern times numbers fell still further through the combined effects of blanket conifer planting of large tracts of the uplands, changes in animal husbandry leading to a reduction in the availability of sheep carrion, and by falling victim to the laying-out of poison baits to control foxes (Mitchell, 1981). As a result, in some of the southern and central counties of Scotland ravens ceased to breed altogether (Thom, 1986).

Within the writer's study area covering the foothills between the north side of Glasgow and the Highland Line, a slow recovery in the local raven population first became apparent towards the end of the 1980s. By the mid 1990s most of the vacant traditional nesting sites in the Kilpatrick, Campsie and Fintry Hills had been re-occupied, with seemingly surplus birds prospecting new territories in the district (Mitchell, 1994). One such pair established themselves at the still worked Dumbuck Quarry, the nest site/s directly overlooking the busy Dumbarton Boulevard (Mitchell, 2000). Even with such close proximity to human presence, to date these birds have successfully reared young at Dumbuck every year for at least ten seasons. On the Renfrewshire side of the River Clyde ravens are similarly extending their breeding range towards the urban areas, not only utilising quarry faces but electricity pylons (Gibson, 2007).

In the early spring of 2007 word was received that a pair of ravens had been seen carrying sticks to the outer cage-work to a pair of huge gasometers dominating the skyline at Temple within the Glasgow city boundaries (Fig. 1). Despite being surrounded by housing estates, a railway line and a canal towpath – well used by walkers, joggers and cyclists alike – the Temple gas storage installation is secure against intrusion and disturbance from outside. During personal visits to the site over the next few weeks, observations made from just outwith the high perimeter fence confirmed that a pair of ravens was indeed regularly present, although as far as I was able to ascertain their stick-gathering activities came to very little.



**Fig. 1.** The structure of the outer cages to the two gasometers at Temple in Glasgow offers many convenient niches where a pair of ravens could build a nest.

Ravens do not normally breed until they are at least three years old (Ratcliffe, 1997), so that it is possible they were immature birds just going through the motions of nest-building. In adopting an urban way of life, there can be little doubt that these particular ravens are following their forebear's old trade as town scavengers. Very little misses the sharp eye of a raven and it is likely these opportunistic birds have already discovered rich pickings amongst the leftovers from 'carry-out' meals carelessly discarded on the surrounding streets.

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