

# Bird Watcher speaking today at Bergen County Camera

**Jim Wright**

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Have you taken a photograph that stands above the rest? I didn't know I had one until last month when Bergen County Camera asked me to present a free Zoom seminar about my nature pictures.

To help publicize my free talk at 9:30 a.m. today, they requested a "signature" photograph. After drawing a blank, I decided to go with an extraordinary encounter that inspired a Bird Watcher column in 2016. It happened within 50 yards of my house.

I was in my living room, minding my own business, when a large dark bird landed atop a nesting box on a nearby lake.

I grabbed my camera and ran to the closest observation point in time to see a crow on the box and Mom and Dad wood duck swimming nervously below. It was breeding season, and the ducks were no doubt concerned about their eggs inside the box.

When the crow took



**My signature photo: A crow dives a wood duck nesting box in Allendale.**

COURTESY OF JIM WRIGHT

off, the ducks flew atop the box. Soon after, I photographed the crow dive-bombing the wood ducks. That dramatic photo of the skirmish between the two bird species stays with me to this day.

What the heck was going on? The crows, like their corvid cousins the ravens, are legendary for their intelligence and shenanigans. They could not have fit inside the nest boxes to get the eggs. And the crow didn't attack the wood ducks so much as show them who was boss.

I consulted a corvid expert, who said he'd seen that behavior before but wasn't sure of the motivation. The crows might be seeking food, checking

for screech owls, are just acting mischievously.

I thought I found the answer in a rare-book store recently. In a 1946 book called "Crow Shooting," the author advocated killing this "feathered assassin of the wild" and cited a Ducks Unlimited study that claimed crows ate millions and millions of ducklings and duck eggs a year.

How times have changed.

Matt Coffey of Ducks Unlimited says that crows and other corvids still "eat duck eggs and most other things that they can find," but that duck populations have been at historic highs for more than a decade — "so that would argue that corvid depredation is not currently a huge limiting factor."

And Kevin McGowan of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology says that "crows are treated much better now than in the 1940s and 1950s," when they were considered pests ripe for eradication by humans, but that they face an altogether different threat.

"The biggest problem for American crows is the West Nile Virus," says McGowan, "which devastated populations starting in 1999."

He's not sure why the crows were divebombing the nestbox either.

I chose the photo for my "signature" shot not only because it is so striking, but also because it tells a story that remains a mystery. Any ideas?

For more info on my Bergen County Camera talk, go to <https://bit.ly/333ROXU>.

Email Jim at [celeryfarm@gmail.com](mailto:celeryfarm@gmail.com).

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