Common Raven: *Corvus corax* and Brown-Necked Raven: *Corvus ruficollis*

**In the Wild**

**Description:**
- **Size:**
  - Common raven: 22-27 inches (56-59 cm)
  - Brown-necked raven: 20-22 inches (52-56 cm)
  - Ravens are the largest passerines (perching birds)
- **Weight:**
  - Common raven: 1.5-3.6 pounds (689-1,625 g)
  - Brown-necked raven: 1.1-1.4 pounds (500-647 g)
- **Large, black birds with a wedge-shaped tail**
- **The brown-necked raven is smaller, slimmer and has shorter wings than the common raven**

**Habitat and Range:**
- **Common raven:**
  - Are one of the most widespread species – live throughout North America and Eurasia, north into the Arctic and as far south as Central America and northern Africa
  - Found in a variety of habitats, including forest, tundra, grassland, cities, deserts and sea coasts
- **Brown-necked raven:**
  - Found in western Africa, the Middle East and south-western Asia
  - Live in a variety of habitats including hot deserts, savannas, shrub land, freshwater springs and oases, and urban areas, including dumps

**Diet:**
- **Omnivore**
  - Are very adaptable opportunists and are considered both predators and scavengers
  - Eat animal carcasses, garbage, bird eggs, dog food, insects, a variety of plant material including grains, seeds, berries and fruits, and prey upon birds, snakes, and small mammals such as rodents

**Adaptations:**
- **Have a ruff of feathers around the throat, called 'hackles', used for visual communication**
- **Have a well developed suite of vocalizations – a wide variety have been documented, including alarm calls, comfort sounds, chase calls and territorial calls**
- **Have been observed hoarding food in order to survive during periods when food is limited – use their excellent memory to remember where they have hidden food**
- **As a result of their intelligence, ravens sometimes hunt cooperatively**
  - Common ravens have been observed distracting polar bears from its kill so other birds in its group may steal some of the carcass
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- The brown-necked raven has been observed cooperatively flushing insects out of long grasses

**Lifespan:**
- About 20-25 years

**Ecosystem relationships:**
- Predators:
  - Ravens are very rarely seen as prey for other animals
  - Eggs and chicks are sometimes taken by large hawks and eagles, other ravens, owls and martens
- At a kill site, ravens will submit to larger predators such as polar bears, wolves, coyotes and birds of prey such as eagles

**Reproduction:**
- Ravens form devoted pairs and may mate for life
- The breeding season varies by region and by the length of the winter
- Build enormous nests, sometimes 4 feet wide, out of twigs and other objects
  - The brown-necked raven sometimes constructs nests near lappet-faced vulture nests for protection
- The female usually lays 3-7 eggs per clutch and incubates them for about 3 weeks
- During incubation, the male brings the female food
- Once the chicks hatch, they remain in the nest for about a month and are fed regurgitated food by both parents

**Activity:**
- Diurnal
- When there is little food, are most likely to be seen alone or in pairs
- May gather in flocks, sometimes in the hundreds, when food is abundant
- Breeding pairs establish nesting territories, which vary in size based on the amount of food in the area

**Other “fun facts”:**
- Ravens are members of the *Corvidae* family along with jays, crows and magpies
  - Ravens are generally much larger than crows
  - Ravens have wedge-shaped tails while crows have fan-shaped tails
  - Ravens are often seen gliding, whereas crows are rarely seen gliding
  - Both ravens and crows are jet-black with iridescent purple and blue-green patches on their wings and throats
- The common raven is sometimes called the northern raven
- The brown-necked raven is sometimes called the desert raven
- As intelligent and curious birds, they have been observed sliding down snow banks on their backs, playing tag and hide-and-go-seek
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- Have well developed vocalizations – can imitate complex sounds such as cars driving by or a dog’s bark

**Conservation Status and Threats:**
- **Common raven:**
  - Listed on the IUCN Red List as Least Concern – have a very large range, are considered abundant and common
  - Are often killed by humans for preying on lambs or destroying crops
  - Have disappeared from parts of their range, but some populations are becoming re-established
- **Brown-necked raven:**
  - Listed on the IUCN Red List as Least Concern – have a very large range, are considered abundant and common
  - In Saudi Arabia, one study found that collision and electrocution by power lines is a major cause of death for some bird species, including the brown-necked raven
- Although ravens are abundant and are not considered threatened or endangered, it is important to conserve their habitat since they play an important part in rodent control

**At the Zoo**

*Rise, Conquer and Poe* were born in 2009 and purchased from a breeder at about 6 weeks old. All 3 birds are males and weigh approximately 1.8 pounds (750 g). Brothers Rise and Conquer are the official mascots of the Baltimore Ravens football team. All 3 are hybrids, bred from two African species (the brown-necked raven and the pied crow) that are very closely related to the common raven. We needed young birds for our program and so had to acquire them from a breeder. There are few corvid breeders and they focus on exotic species because of the restrictions on keeping native corvids. This cross works well for us because they have the appearance of the common raven but are easier to work with.

**What We Can Do**

- Make environmentally responsible lifestyle decisions to help conserve habitat – conserve energy, reduce litter and pollution
  - Birds are sometimes hit and injured or killed by passing cars, possibly due in part to mice lingering along roads, eating litter such as apple cores or crumbs from wrappers – we can prevent litter by throwing our trash in trashcans rather than on the side of the road

**References:**
- [http://www.marylandzoo.org/animals-conservation/birds/common-raven/](http://www.marylandzoo.org/animals-conservation/birds/common-raven/)
- [http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/accounts/Corvus_corax/](http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/accounts/Corvus_corax/)
- [http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/106005796/0](http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/106005796/0)
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