

LETTER

Studying and collecting clever corvids' nests could ruin their breeding success - a response to Hiemstra *et al.* (2023)

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Studying clever corvids' nest building from anti-bird spikes (Hiemstra *et al.* 2023) could ruin their breeding success. Birds abandon nests if harassed, dooming hatchlings or eggs.

The observational and in-situ bird nest study by Hiemstra *et al.* (2023) claims the tree hosting a crow's nest had to be pruned for maintenance, with the spike nest "collected unfinished and not (yet) used for breeding" One wonders if the evicted pair parents-to-be had to waste energy scavenging materials for a new home.

The other study finding was that a magpie nest built from 1500 anti-bird spikes at the University Hospital of Antwerp "had been used for two years and was collected well after the breeding season" (Hiemstra *et al.* 2023). This ignores the potential that a sturdily-constructed nest can be reused in future breeding seasons. After all, one in five magpies in Sofia Bulgaria chose to domicile in their old nests the next season. Reassuringly, returnees laid eggs significantly earlier compared to those having to build a new nest (Antonov & Atanasova 2003).

Furthermore, Hiemstra *et al.* (2023) may encourage errant amateur human observers, who risk being misperceived as "break and enter" predators by nest occupants. Removing metallic nests to study in the laboratory equates to stealing long-lasting homes useful to raise hatchlings for a lifetime. I'd urge you to please consider leaving bird nesters raising a family in peace as much as possible in future ornithology research. The potential disruption to bird breeding behaviours and chick-rearing welfare remains paramount. Studied wildlife still have rights to privacy and to being left alone.

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