

Rooks *Corvus frugilegus*

Identification

Size: Rooks are large birds, about the same size and build as a magpie.

Appearance: Glossy black plumage with a slightly purple tint. Mature birds have grayish/white piece of skin on the forehead, extending from the base of the bill to the nostrils, while younger birds have feathers here.

Call: Rooks have a harsh “KAAH” call.

Nesting: Rooks are gregarious birds and live in colonies called rookeries. They nest in tall trees and usually feed in flocks.



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Why are they a pest?

Although rooks are not always considered a pest – some people find them aesthetically pleasing, and they can help control insect pests such as army worms and grass grubs - to cropping farmers they are a major pest.

Most serious is the damage they cause to farms by eating and destroying newly sown cereals, ripening lentils, walnuts, acorns, pumpkin seeds, and occasionally potatoes and fruit. They can also pull young pumpkin and maize plants from the ground in an attempt to obtain the seeds.

Crop damage by rooks is dependant on the availability of alternative food sources as insects and grubs are their primary source of food. During times of frost or drought crop damage is more likely as natural foods become scarce.

Where are they a pest?

Rooks are a particular pest in Tararua District, although they are widespread throughout the Region. We are always keen to hear of new rookeries establishing so please let us know if you see one.

Control

Rooks are extremely wary, intelligent birds and rook control is a specialised field. Horizons staff have the expertise and experience to carry out rook control and this work should not be attempted by individuals. Shooting birds in a rookery will cause them to disperse and set up more rookeries, and poisons can make the birds poison shy.

Rooks are considered a regionally undesirable animal, based on the impact these birds can, and do have on our environment therefore Horizons carries out control operations and monitoring of rook populations at no cost to affected landowners.

Contact us on freephone 0508 800 800 if you spot a rookery, or if rooks are causing damage on your property.