

Raven — Qalngaaq

QALNGAAT TAMARMENG TEGLERTAARTUT. – ALL RAVENS STEAL.



Photo: A common raven

The common raven (*Corvus corax*) is a year-round resident of Alaska that lives happily in every environment, from coastal meadows to arctic tundra and even city streets. This large member of the Corvidae family includes crows, jays, and magpies, the raven is an all-black bird with a distinctive, wedge-shaped tail, shaggy feathers around its throat, a large bill, and a variety of hoarse calls. Ravens say “kraak” or may coo “glook.”

These quick learning birds are known for their cunning. They chatter, use tools, and have a complex social life. Alaska Natives have long admired the raven’s intelligence, and in Tlingit, Athabaskan, Yup’ik, and Alutiiq tales, Raven is a favorite character.

In Alutiiq stories, the Raven is both a creator and a hero. He appears as a bird but possesses supernatural powers that assist him in great deeds. He can speak Alutiiq, is strong enough to carry a whale, and can transform himself into other beings. One tale tells how Raven brought light to the world. By tricking a stingy chief in a distant land, he obtained two boxes, one with the moon and stars, the other with the sun. For bringing these priceless possessions home to his village, the chief rewarded Raven with marriage to the chief’s two daughters.